

**TEACHERS' (K-5) PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT  
BEHAVIORS DURING STANDARDIZED TESTING**

By

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Problem Statement.....	6
Meaning of Terms.....	8
Purpose of Inquiry.....	9
Significance of the Study.....	9
Limitations of Study .....	11
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	12
History of Testing .....	12
High Stakes Tests .....	13
Public Pressures .....	14
A Nation at Risk .....	15
Testing in Oklahoma .....	16
Leadership Pressures .....	19
Tests and Anxiety .....	21
Creating Communities of Learners .....	22
Autonomy and Testing .....	24
Active Autonomy.....	25
Autonomy vs. Testing .....	26
Portfolio and Authentic Assessments .....	28
Summary .....	29
III. METHODOLOGY.....	31
Phenomenological Inquiry and Pedagogical Thoughtfulness.....	31
Protocol Writing .....	34
Tact and Pedagogical Thoughtfulness .....	34
Identification of Participants.....	38
Procedures.....	40
Survey.....	40
Interviews.....	41
Trustworthiness.....	42
Credibility.....	42
Peer Debriefing.....	42
Member Checking.....	43
Transferability.....	43
Dependability and Confirmability.....	43
Data Analysis.....	44

	Design .....	46
	Participants .....	47
	Interviews .....	48
IV.	FINDINGS .....	50
	Introduction .....	50
	My Lived Experience.....	51
	Survey Results.....	54
	Teacher Survey Results.....	54
	Summary.....	67
	Interviews.....	68
	Interview with Megan.....	68
	Interview with Rachel.....	74
	Interview with Charlize.....	78
	Interview with Julia.....	83
	Merging the Survey Results and the Interview Results.....	89
	Emergence of the Themes.....	90
	Theme 1: Teacher Memories.....	92
	Theme 2: Helplessness.....	94
	Theme 3: Accountability and Curriculum.....	95
	Theme 4: Community .....	97
	Theme 5: Nurturing.....	98
	Theme 6: Changes.....	100
	The Missing Themes.....	104
V.	DISCUSSION.....	107
	Discussion.....	107
	Research Question.....	108
	Sub-Questions.....	114
	Implications.....	115
	Recommendations.....	118
VI.	REFERENCES.....	123
VII.	APPENDICES	
	Appendix A-IRB Approval Form.....	132
	Appendix B-Online Survey.....	133
	Appendix C-Interview Transcripts.....	142
	Appendix D-Consent Letters.....	154
	Appendix E-Interview Script.....	157

## VIII. LIST OF FIGURES

1. Completion/Dropout Rate.....	55
2. Free and Reduced Lunch.....	56
3. Grade Levels Taught.....	57
4. Purposes of Standardized Tests at Schools.....	58
5. Teachers Practicing for Standardized Test.....	59
6. Analysis of Teachers Practicing for Standardized Test.....	59
7. Time Spent Practicing for the Test.....	60
8. Test Score Results.....	62
9. Standardized Tests Measure Student Learning.....	63
10. Analysis of Standardized Test Measure Student Learning.....	63
11. Student Behavior During Testing.....	65, 101



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

***“Anyone who has looked carefully at standardized tests knows that they are loaded with trivia. Our children are being fed intellectual junk food, and we would do well to insist on a healthier diet.”***

**Noddings, (2004)**

From the first day of school, my kindergarten students and I had strived to build community together, creating rules for the classroom, holding morning meetings, and discussing perceived joys and sorrows during those times. By April a discernable bond was present among classmates and teacher. Children explored, collaborated, and took risks in their learning in this atmosphere of mutual trust. Kindergarten was a place to learn, play, grow, reflect, and respect others.

On the second Monday in April of that year, I stopped by the office to pick up the required booklets of tests our district had mandated. The tests were being administered to determine readiness for first grade and to establish a “grade equivalency” for students to begin the next year. I viewed the computerized answer sheets with concern, imagining students would have difficulty filling in bubbles precisely enough to be read and scored by a machine. I didn’t comprehend what one week of testing would do to a happy, secure class of 22

kindergarten children. The first day of testing seemed endless, as students quickly became distracted and frustrated in their attempts to translate what I was reading into a choice to “bubble” in on their page. One child repeatedly dropped her pencil to avoid having to choose among answers. Another made a pattern with his answer choices similar to our pattern on the monthly calendar...A B A B A B. By Wednesday some children were absent. Parents called to voice concerns over changes in their children’s behavior. On Thursday a mother brought her son to school and pulled me aside to share that he had wet the bed the previous night and had ground his teeth in his sleep, clear signs of significant stress not present prior to this week. I felt horrible and thought if children had come to class displaying these types of behavior changes, I would suspect abuse of some type might be occurring. It was devastating to know I had played a part in causing these changes in children by administering the test. Discussions with the other kindergarten teacher revealed similar changes in student behavior had taken place in her classroom as well. In researching testing of young children, I found an absence of documentation on what changes occur in children while undergoing standardized tests.

A test can be determined as high stakes if the results of the test have apparent or real consequences for students, staff, or schools (Madaus, 1988). According to Hendrie (1996), scores from nationally normed standardized tests were a chief factor in determining who would be placed on probation. Manzo (1996) reported that Philadelphia was planning to link teacher raises and cash awards to schools based on student test scores, attendance, and graduation

rates. Gradually more states, cities, and school boards are using test scores in order to evaluate schools and allocate resources. In October 1996, Chicago put 109 schools on academic probation as a result of low test scores. For schools with chronically low-performing students, schools could be forced to replace up to three-fourths of their staffs.

The consequences of testing can be both intended and unintended. Corbett and Wilson (1991) state:

Stakes can become high when test results automatically trigger important consequences for students or the school system, and also when educators, students, or the public perceive that significant consequences accompany test results. Thus, a formal trigger of consequences need not be built into the testing program for stakes to be high. Instead, test results can cause the public to make an assessment of the quality of the school system that serves them, and this judgment in turn can lead to a conclusion that children's choices . . . have been affected. The product of this process can be increased public pressure to improve test scores, especially when the perception is that the system is likely to have a negative impact on those choices. (p. 27)

Because of the pressure on test scores, more hard-to-teach children are rejected by the system. There is a direct correspondence between accountability pressure and the number of children denied kindergarten entrance, assigned to two-year kindergarten programs, referred to special education, made to repeat a grade, or who drop out of school.

Potter and Wall (1992) found evidence that, as early as preschool, children were being held back a grade in hopes of receiving a higher score on future tests. Allington and McGill-Franzen (1992) examined test scores in districts that had claimed increases in student performance on high stakes tests. The districts came from a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural) and socioeconomic statuses. Instead of finding evidence of increased learning and better teaching, the authors found an increase in the proportion of students retained a grade or placed in special education. The test data were calculated by determining which children started kindergarten together. When test scores of children who had been identified for special education or who had been held back a year were included in the test scores, the gains districts had been reporting disappeared.

Corbett and Wilson (1991) found that teachers in Maryland, a high stakes state, reported greater impact on their students' and their own lives than did teachers in a low-stakes state. Teachers in the high stakes state also reported more stress, more paperwork, and decreased reliance on their professional judgment. A qualitative study using classroom observations and interviews of teachers by Rottenberg and Smith (1990) found negative effects for both students and teachers in a high stakes testing program. They looked at the role of external testing in elementary schools in Arizona. The tests used in these schools, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), were considered high stakes because the results were used in the evaluation of principals and schools, and because the media reported ITBS scores by school and grade level.

For pupils, particularly younger ones, most teachers at my school believe that standardized testing is cruel and unusual punishment. Because of the length and difficulty of tests, the number of tests, the time limits, the fine print, and the difficulty in transferring answers to answer sheets, teachers believe tests cause stress, frustration, burn-out, fatigue, physical illness, misbehavior and fighting, and psychological distress. Some teachers believe that the tests cause their pupils to develop test anxiety and a failure mentality.

Just mention the word *testing* at a school today and one can immediately feel the tension. No matter the spin placed on testing, it boils down to the fact that tests, and in particular high stakes tests, are redefining teaching and desirable classroom outcomes.

Teachers today express outrage and rally among themselves in an attempt to facilitate best practices in teaching and assessment (Chase, 2002). What benefits for children are gained by keeping these concerns in the “schoolhouse”? When a child is hurt and crying, the normal reaction is to quickly comfort and assist them with whatever is wrong. Max van Manen (1990) discusses the concept of pedagogy as being concerned with the child’s self and development and the child’s nature and becoming. How a child fares in growing toward adulthood is influenced by our actions and by our lack of actions as teachers. van Manen discerns tact in teaching as being able to determine what is or is not pedagogically worthy about a particular subject or action. The effects of standardized testing on children’s behavior causes concern for parents and educators alike. Acting thoughtfully and with tact toward the testing of children

possesses a mindfulness oriented toward children. Many educators are in a position to perceive how testing affects children and probably have their own anecdotes to recall about testing week from their experiences. Education should be a rich human experience, not an atmosphere of tension, structured agendas, and quick data recall that will soon be forgotten.

### **Problem Statement**

Meier (1992) believes teachers need to know their students to teach them well. Classrooms should encourage creativity and risk taking. Caring and nurturing established in a classroom are vital for student success. Tests, in particular standardized tests, may serve to undermine a caring community of learners.

Test anxiety is commonly experienced by many individuals on examinations and may serve to undermine how well an individual does or does not do on any given test. Test anxiety has become an increasingly prevalent issue during this century (Speilberger & Vagg, 1995). However, the predominance of research on the subject has focused on the effects of test anxiety on adults. How testing may or may not influence the behavior of children has not received much attention.

School districts are increasing their reliance on achievement tests; specifically, standardized testing, to monitor curriculum content and progress. Pressure to use this type of assessment comes from policy makers, parents and administrators. Intense scrutiny is focused on districts, schools, and classes that fail to achieve “successful” scores. Accountability is the justification provided to

administer these types of tests as if evidence were needed to sustain or modify instruction. The timed nature of these types of tests and the “one right answer” format has begun to shape curriculum and teaching styles. Stresses inflicted by these types of tests are felt to have an impact on children, and in particular on children’s behavior.

This study attempted to document some of the changes in children’s behavior that occur during standardized testing. The focus was to observe children through the eyes of their teachers, the very ones who are already acquainted with the students and their normal day-to-day mannerisms and attitudes. Included are interviews and surveys of teachers who have administered tests to their students. The main research question was:

**What are the effects of standardized tests on student behavior as reported by their teachers?**

The following are the sub-questions that were considered in this topic for research. They included:

1. What are differences in behavior during testing between girls and boys?
2. What are the changes during testing in the behavior of children who come from homes of poverty?
3. What are the connections between the teacher’s behavior and the children’s behavior during testing?

## **MEANING OF TERMS**

**Accountability** -The *No Child Left Behind* accountability system is defined in terms of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a way to measure the improvement in achieving standards for all students each year. Schools and states are held accountable for improvements on an annual basis by public reporting (as well as individualized reporting to parents), and ultimately through consequences if adequate results are not achieved. (NCEO, 2003)

**Autonomy** – The ability to govern oneself and to make knowledgeable decisions by taking all relevant factors into account, independently of rewards and punishments.

**High Stakes Test** – Tests that have the effect of threatening punishment or consequences to teachers, students, schools, or school districts as a means of influencing curricular and instructional practices.

**Standardized Test** – A formal evaluation that takes a sample of performance under specific conditions and rules, has demonstrated reliability and validity, and is used in multiple schools to measure the aptitude or achievement of students.



**Standards Movement** – A stance first noted in the 1980s that specified for the assessment of the products or outcomes of schools instead of class size, budgets, or square footage of buildings.

**Test Anxiety** – Traits or behaviors that occur during formal evaluative situations that are generally negative in experience.

### **PURPOSE OF INQUIRY**

The purpose of this study was to corroborate and document teachers' reported observations of changes in children's behavior that may or may not occur during the standardized testing of children. By examining the themes from interviews and survey questions of classroom teachers, I hoped to add to the research reported in professional literature on the effects of testing on children's behavior.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF INQUIRY**

The goal of this study was to provide professionals in the field of education a teacher's report of children's behavior during tests and test anxiety experienced by children. Viewing these changes in behavior and considering the effects upon self concept may result in providing insight into the need for alternative methods of testing children. The extensiveness of testing today in schools increases the need to review the effects of testing on student behavior and performance. As students' lives become more and more impacted by their test scores, it is critical that test anxiety and behavior changes in children be explored and documented.

The Alliance for Childhood, a partnership of educators and health professionals, has asked policymakers to consider the toll taken by high stakes testing, which has ranged from stomachaches to insomnia and depression (Cole, 2001).

Research by Beidel, Turner, and Trager (1994) reported that out of almost 200 elementary students, more than 40 percent self-reported their test anxiety as significant. The impact of this anxiety on test scores and self esteem is perceived by educators to be negative. School districts and state boards of education now issue school report cards, with the test results widely reported by the media. Realtors provide copies of school report cards to potential clients to “sell” them a home in a district with high test outcomes.

Other pressures are evident to raise test scores in local schools. My own experience has included lengthy faculty meetings and detailed memos stressing the importance of improving test scores. As a member of a textbook selection committee, our guidelines suggested reviewing those textbooks that would “raise test scores.” What is missing from these discussions is the impact on children when there is an increased emphasis on test scores. This concern and emphasis on raising test scores is undoubtedly transmitted to students and contributes to increasing levels of test anxiety and potentially negative changes in student behavior. It is important to understand how testing impacts student behavior, and how classrooms can maintain a caring and nurturing environment during testing.

## **LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

By design, qualitative inquiry limits the breadth of the sample. This study interviewed four teachers about their perceptions of student behavior during testing. The survey reached teachers in two school districts in a limited geographical area of Oklahoma. This limitation might result in misleading interpretation of their perceptions if the results are applied to a broader population of teachers. The use of the Internet was a limiting factor because of spam filters that kept the survey from reaching all intended respondents. This is discussed more in the Findings section of this dissertation.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

**“Every hour spent on such exam preparation is an hour not spent helping students to become critical, creative, curious learners.”**

**Alfie Kohn, New York Times, December 9, 1999**

#### **History of Testing**

Schools in America did not begin with the notion of testing students. Frontier families were very isolated and spread out, making assessment a personal interchange between student and teacher. However, the Civil War era produced some of the nation's first widespread tests, as the government struggled to document the progress of educating both citizens and immigrants. The melting pot philosophy needed some means of determining the effectiveness of schools in the United States (Cremin, 1964). By the 1930's, many schools across America were conducting some type of a standardized test, but on a very small scale. Scores certainly were not reported in the paper or readily available for public viewing (ACEI, 1996). Before 1965, tests were not administered in early grades because everyone seemed to understand the developmental aspects of grades K-2. However, the 1980's saw a rapid acceleration in testing children in all grades, even before kindergarten, and by the 1990's the burden for

testing was placed on the state education departments, with 85% of states utilizing a multiple choice format (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003).

### **High Stakes Tests**

The implementation of mandates from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Goals 2000 has quickly accelerated the push for accountability through testing. NCLB is driving curricular changes with the potential of doing harm to students, and in particular young children. Children are pressured into early formal literacy activities before they are developmentally ready, and this trickle down effect from high stakes tests is driving curricular changes that are not employing best practices in education for children (Meier, 2002).

High stakes testing can mean different things to different groups, but the most common definition of a high stakes test is a test that results in sanctions of some type. Students, teachers, and schools are rewarded for good performance, and bad performance results in punishment. Students are being recommended for retention from doing poorly on a high-stakes test and in some states are prevented from graduating from high school. Teachers in schools with high test scores may receive cash incentives, while poorly performing schools risk being taken over by the government (Kohn, 2000). These sanctions translate to a temptation for teachers and administrators to align curriculum to teach to the test. This leads to less creative teaching, less internalized learning for the student, and ultimately poorer overall performance for students (Kohn, 1996).

The Association for Childhood Education International's official position is that standardized testing should not be required any sooner than the third grade

of school (ACEI/Perrone, 1991). Many schools in the United States are becoming huge test preparation centers, with students drilling for the test for the better part of the school year. This push to demand accountability through testing is creating tremendous pressure on students, teachers, and parents. Professional organizations such as the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association (2000), and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998) have issued specific high-stakes position statements. These statements support arguments that test results should not be the only factor taken into consideration when making high-stakes decisions and that additional measures must be used to get a full profile of a student's range of abilities.

### **Public Pressures**

Media attention and public pressure can have a tremendous effect on teacher autonomy. While one teacher may take a stand on an educational issue such as high-stakes tests, the dominant group's objectives can crush the voice of the teacher willing to take a risk and speak out. Indeed, much has been written about the demise of American education and its failure to keep pace with its global partners in educational outcomes. It is intimidating to consider taking on the big guns of large scale assessment mandates armed only with the day to day measures and assessments developed by a classroom teacher. After all, some believe that teaching to the test is socially acceptable these days if the reward is improved scores for students. Some teachers provide actual classroom lessons that include practice items from a high stakes test (Popham, 2001).

Politicians at every level are rallying support for educational reform that holds educators “accountable” for student achievement. These challenges from the public sector can further the isolation and helplessness felt by the average classroom teacher. A single score from a high stakes test can result in tracking and retention decisions that might negatively impact the student.

Tests should be designed and selected that measure multiple aspects of a child’s progress and development. Standardized tests should be only one of several means of evaluating a student. Parents, legislators and other public figures do not always realize the negative implications of standardized tests. Educators need to actively participate in discussions of high stakes tests during focus groups, PTA meetings, through postings on web sites or in legislative letter-writing campaigns (Parris & Urdan, 2000). Teachers can risk “doing harm” by not advocating best practice for students in forums external to the comfort of the school setting. No longer is it enough to close the classroom door and ignore the impact of current reform efforts.

### **Nation at Risk**

A study by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) produced a document called *A Nation at Risk* that significantly eroded the public’s trust in education. Despite the inaccurate representation of the data contained in the report, education in the United States found that it was under direct attack and much reform in education stemmed from this report (Berliner & Biddle, 1997). Most of the reforms outlined suggests educators and schools need to become accountable for educational failures in the way a business is

rewarded and punished for failures. Could one really compare the recent problems that surfaced in the automotive industry with defective tires and SUV rollovers to schools and declining test scores? While it might be possible to identify a faulty component of a manufacturing process that leads to the production of a defective tire, it is unfair to link poor performance on a high-stakes test to a defective link in the educational process. Teachers are unable to control other influences on the child that might affect outcomes such as poverty and inequitable school funding (Biddle & Berliner, 2002).

### **Testing in Oklahoma**

Schools across the United States are ensuring that all students are making progress annually in the classroom. Working backward from 2013-2014, the school year designated as the target year for full implementation of No Child Left Behind, states are required to measure the amount of student progress made. The progress must reflect several subgroups of students, not just reflect an average for students (Christie, 2003).

In Oklahoma, House Bill 1414 was authored to change the Oklahoma School Testing Program. These changes included: changing the dates tests were given, changing grade levels tested and the content areas tested, and it also described the assessment resources available to teachers, parents, and students. The Oklahoma School Accountability System was also changed to reflect compliance with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The following are some of the changes made in Oklahoma School Testing Program according to the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) web site:



- Beginning with the 2004-05 school year, there will be no state level norm-referenced test.
- Grade 3: The norm-referenced test will be replaced with reading and math criterion-referenced tests aligned to Oklahoma's standards, the Priority Academic Student Skills, with implementation in the 2004-05 school year.
- Grade 4: Reading and math standards-based criterion-referenced tests will be implemented in the 2004-05 school year.
- Grade 5: the U. S. History/Constitution/Government criterion-referenced test and the Geography criterion-referenced test were replaced with a single standards-based criterion-referenced Social Studies test.
- Fine arts assessments in Grades 3 through 8 beginning in the 2004-05 school year. The assessments will be designed to assess each student in the fine arts area in which the student has received instruction.
- Vertical alignment of standards-based criterion-referenced tests in Grades 3-8: Tests will be vertically aligned by content across grade levels to ensure consistency, continuity, alignment and clarity.

Oklahoma state law also required the Education Oversight Board to establish a program to assess and measure student progress in a way that the public could understand. The State Board of Education was tasked with "ensuring that each local education agency was provided with Academic Performance Index data annually by site and by district

so that the local education agency can make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations to identify schools for rewards and sanctions. The State Board of Education shall establish a system of recognition, rewards, sanctions and technical assistance.” (OSDE, 2005).

The API (Academic Performance Indicator) formula was developed, and is calculated in the following way:

The API formula is based on three major components, which include seven indicators mandated by state law: attendance rates, dropout rates, results of the Oklahoma School Testing Program, participation in Advanced Placement classes, graduation rates, scores on the ACT (American College Test), and college remediation rates. The API draws on data for all state tests in math and reading, calculated as an index using the percentage of students at each performance level, multiplied by specified weights. The testing program results constitute less than 60% of the value of the index. Based on the API, the state board is required to adopt expected annual percentage growth targets for the state, the districts, and all schools. The minimum growth target is 5 percent annually, but the state board may set differential growth targets based on the grade level of instruction (Christie, 2003).

In addition to the mandates resultant from House Bill 1414 and NCLB, school districts are implementing their own assessments and tests to ascertain and measure the learning of students. These tests, also known as “end of

instruction” tests are administered at the end of nine or 18 week periods to students in all grades. There also are tests occurring in the classroom, test based on regular assessment of learning, Accelerated Reader tests, and tests to measure reading comprehension and fluency.

### **Leadership Pressures**

There have been many accounts of spirited rallying in the teacher’s lounge prior to test week and the celebrations that occur when scores are published in the local paper. Students in a Texas high school crowded into a gym to have a pep rally for the TAAS, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (Gutloff, 1999). At other schools, principals tell staff members to “stand and deliver” or to “beef it up” in terms of curriculum that will result in content that would translate into higher test scores than the previous year. All of this adds to the confusion and reluctance of a teacher to take a stand and argue for alternative ways to assess and evaluate students.

Administrators have cut back or even taken out recess for elementary students, eliminated music and other electives in an effort to narrow the curriculum to reflect items found on standardized tests (Kohn, 2001). Children are getting back strain from heavy backpacks laden with homework, and even kindergartners are terrified of failing (Ohanian, 2002). A very negative consequence of high stakes tests is the increased retention and tracking of students, particularly in the elementary years. Retention and tracking both are linked to increased drop out rates among students, particularly from minority and ethnic groups (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003).

*No Child Left Behind* does not currently offer any funding or support for programs that might truly translate into improved performance, such as early childhood education programs, smaller class sizes, or providing assistance to economically disadvantaged students. Most schools with high test scores typically are associated with “socioeconomic characteristics such as the parent’s occupations, levels of education, the family’s income, and the location of the school...*the zip code factor*” (Wesson, 2001, p. 16). Additionally, reform efforts in education have largely been based on the misinterpreted results of previous studies that negatively ranked American students internationally. For the past several years, the public has been inundated with politicians misrepresenting educational research and the quality of education in the United States (Berliner & Biddle, 1997).

Strangely enough, many of the recommendations to implement high-stakes tests and to reform curriculum are coming from politicians, not educators. Most professional educators would argue that what creates higher standards in schools and motivates students are classrooms and schools which facilitate a sense of community, risk-taking, and provides students learning experiences based on their interests (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Other methods are available for assessing student learning.

Alternative assessment is an ongoing process that not only monitors a student’s progress, but involves the student in making decisions about their own capabilities. A very negative consequence of high stakes tests are the increased retention and tracking of students, particularly in the elementary years. Retention

and tracking both are linked to increased drop out rates among students, particularly from minority and ethnic groups.

### **Tests and Anxiety**

Anxiety is a two edged sword in testing; it can be both a cause and effect of school difficulties; students perform poorly because of it and then the poor performance raises the anxiety present in them (Tobias, 1985). Tests and especially standardized tests are a great source of anxiety for many students. The fact that the test has a time limit is in itself a source of stress for students. Remove the time limit on a test and anxious students perform as well as non-anxious ones. If the time limit is imposed, anxious students perform much worse than non-anxious ones (Hill & Easton, 1977).

Family relationships can also affect the level of anxiety during testing in a student. A study by Peleg-Popko (2002) studied many parents and their elementary age children. The researcher determined that student anxiety levels decreased if they were encouraged by their parents. Sometimes anxiety is only present in temporary situations such as testing. This type of anxiety is called state anxiety, where anxiety that exists in a variety of general situations is called trait anxiety (Covington, 1992). Research by Beidel, Turner, and Trager, (1994) reported that almost 40percent of 200 elementary school students in a study had indicated suffering significant test anxiety in grades 3-6.

## **Creating Communities of Learners**

High stakes tests and other formative means of assessing students may be contrary to constructivist theory in curriculum. Constructivist teaching involves learners who actively build and make meaning, requiring invention and self-organization on the part of the learner. Piaget posited that children progress through stages of development, with each stage noted for the way thoughts and activities are organized. Play is emphasized as an important means for children to learn and construct knowledge (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2000). Project work is one way to engage students. In project work, children are encouraged to assess their own proficiency in using their skills, to monitor their own activity, and to select manageable tasks for themselves. Rather than using direct, systematic instruction which assumes children are deficient in a skill, project work sees children as already having proficiencies and capabilities that should be encouraged (Katz & Chard, 1989). The number of projects varies each year, depending on the interests and abilities of the children. Children work together as a community to explore, inquire, and make meaning from a common interest or idea.

A constructivist theory of learning maintains that a child knows or understands. Teaching is centered on creating an environment that allows a child to construct knowledge. The child constructs knowledge by reworking ideas and concepts into her existing knowledge base. The learning sometimes is a result of the conflict that comes from the child's understanding of how things work (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2000). The child has to discover a way to obtain

closure or a resolution of the conflict, internalizing the facts and steps she took for herself. The child takes new information and compares it with existing knowledge. Then, the child must have a chance to test the theory he or she has developed to create understanding. (Duckworth, 1987).

Good constructivist teachers are the facilitators of children's learning, not merely script readers from a narrowly structured curriculum. Students need to be treated with respect and individualism, and given many opportunities to develop morally within the classroom. Instruction should incorporate exploration, discovery, and understanding. Good constructivist teachers pose problems that require students to use new and previously learned information (Fisher, 2003). Learning in a constructivist classroom requires the teacher to scaffold strategies to meet the needs of the individual students. Within this framework, learning is an active process that is student-centered with the teacher's help (Chrenka, 2001). Students are also provided many opportunities to build community within the classroom. This can occur through frequent class meetings with students voting on key project selection, small groups, research teams and whole class interactions. Students need time for individual exploration also, which provides opportunities for individualized reading and math activities.

A constructivist teacher should also provide modeling of thinking through a problem, explaining and correcting her own thinking as she progresses through the process. In project work, the teacher will make a topic web for the subject being studied. Children are engaged in posing questions and are supported in researching their questions. The teacher will create an outline of key events,

schedule field trips or special guests, and collect basic resources for the project. The project will be organized in three phases, ending with a culminating event which usually gives the students an opportunity to share their project with others (Chard, 2001). Intrinsic motivation should be the goal of project work. In a successful classroom climate teachers:

1. Provide a general and pervasive context of warmth, cooperation, and community.
2. Act with the goal of children's self regulation.
3. Minimize unnecessary external regulation as far as possible and practical.
4. When external regulation is necessary, use the least amount necessary to secure compliance (DeVries & Zan, 2002, p.35).

### **Autonomy and Testing**

The aim of autonomy is to use one's own understanding of values and beliefs to establish a suitable course of action (Rodgers & Long, 2002).

Teachers dance with courage and wisdom to foster best practice in a classroom while putting on their "game face" in the Super Bowl of accountability. The degree of autonomy in a classroom will vary with regard to the teacher's own values and beliefs, the students, the community, and the administrative climate of the school. Kamii (2000) defines autonomy as the ability to decide for oneself between right and wrong in the moral realm, and between truth and untruth in the intellectual realm. Constructivists like Kamii, DeVries, and Piaget have written about how important building autonomy is, and how equally important it is for teachers to be autonomous themselves. It is important to note the difference between autonomy and independence. Developing autonomy involves considering what is right and fair for everyone, regardless of whether that action



is the most popular perspective to take (Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck & Taylor, 2000).

Autonomous teachers have the professional basis which enables them to decide what is educationally and developmentally appropriate for children and to communicate their rationale to others. This professional base of knowledge and best practice does not usually match up to the limited focus of high stakes testing. Autonomy as a goal of education becomes lost in the shuffle for evidence of learning in the form of high test scores. An autonomous teacher might administer the test regardless of the reward system for high test scores.

### **Active Autonomy**

Just as there are varied levels of experience in teaching, there are an equitable number of degrees of autonomy within the profession. The word autonomy is used in varying ways to describe teacher empowerment, advocacy, teacher research and risk-taking. Piaget (1932/1965) said, "Moral autonomy appears when the mind regards as necessary an ideal that is independent of all external pressure" (p.196). He links autonomous thinking to moral action. DeVries and Kohlberg (1987) continue Piaget's line of thought by reflecting that a constructivist teacher has a need to promote autonomy within students and upon self-reflection, provide a change in one's self and teacher attitudes.

Successful recognition of autonomy in teaching occurs when teachers interact with peers and other constructivist teachers (DeVries & Zan, 1994). Constance Kamii (1991) discusses autonomy in the intellectual realm as "Being governed by oneself by being able to take relevant factors into account."

Max van Manen (1991) writes, “The end of human science research for educators is a critical pedagogical competence: knowing how to act tactfully in pedagogic situations on the basis of a carefully edified thoughtfulness” (p. 42). He cautions that it is critical to behave without “moral superiority” (p.10) in distinguishing what is and is not best practice for students (p.10). In taking a stand on an issue, van Manen advises that an educator must be ready to stand out and be criticized. Action and thoughtfully being proactive form a base of autonomy in teachers. At a minimum, teacher autonomy is a constant practice of reflecting how teaching can best promote autonomous learning for *students*.

Noddings (1992) views children as being unique and having varying intelligences. Schools should be a place where children discover their talents and find nurturing of those special talents. School is a place to show children how to care and how to transmit the meaning of care to others. Teachers need to understand how testing may impact the caring nature of a classroom, and to be aware of how a student’s behavior may change upon the student’s perceiving an absence of nurturing previously present. Important emotional connections between student and teacher should be protected even during testing week. Teachers in the position of caregiver must be attuned to hear and receive what students are telling them through their behaviors and actions (Rodgers, 1998).

### **Autonomy vs. Testing**

The changes in curriculum resultant from *No Child Left Behind* and the reforms it has sparked should not have a real impact on teacher autonomy, because most changes appear to be cosmetic in nature, not deep changes in

practice (Schorr & Firestone, 2001). However, these changes in direction of education in the United States suggest that teacher voice is lost in the debate and real harm may come to students who come to school just to be taught how to score high on a high-stakes test. Teachers need to jump feet first into the debate, with the highest degree of risk and autonomy in “doing the right thing.” (Certainly teachers can provide the core curriculum assessed on the high stakes test, but not at the expense of giving up what best practice and pedagogy is known in student learning).

In this age of accountability, personal accountability is one of the most important ones of all. Being personally accountable to ensure students learn in a balanced, enriched way that they deserve is no doubt an important aim of autonomy. An effective degree of autonomy means more than just closing the classroom door and teaching as one feels empowered to do. Teachers need to reach out and form collaborative groups to reflect and discuss best practices, and to search for appropriate courses of action that make sense in providing productive actions for autonomy (Rodgers, 1998). Teacher voice has been marginalized in reform efforts, and novice teachers may especially feel their voice is silent and it is better to not dispute the framework of high-stakes tests (Gratch, 2000). Novice teachers who have not made tenure perhaps feel vulnerable in terms of job security in advocating their ideas. Expert teachers and others can provide support through mentoring relationships which will enable novice teachers to feel connected while establishing their own autonomy. The answer in this age of accountability is not to give up and close the door.

Active autonomy requires teachers to collaborate and make a stand in settings external to the comfort of the school environment. To effectively face the challenges represented by high-stakes tests, teachers need to work in collaboration with others to deal with external constraints. Networking and forming teacher action research groups can develop autonomy while providing opportunities to develop and construct professional expertise and skills. Teaching is a multidimensional activity. One of the most powerful of these dimensions is that of "teacher as researcher, as a careful gardener" (Hubbard & Power, 1999, p.5). Not only do teachers need to use research in their practice; they need to participate in "action" research in which they are always engaging in investigation and striving for improved learning. The key to action research is to pose a question or goal, and then design actions and evaluate progress in a systematic, cyclical fashion as the means to solve the issue are carried out (Hubbard & Power, 1999). Teachers in the climate of high stakes tests are in danger of forgetting how powerful autonomy is and the possible outcome of their efforts to problem solve.

### **Portfolio and Authentic Assessments**

Portfolio and authentic assessments have been gaining popularity as alternatives to standardized testing (Bond, Roeber, & Braskamp, 1996). Portfolio assessments are in-depth looks into students' learning histories. They might include all of the assessments that the students take, as well as examples from their classroom work and other evidence of learning. Authentic assessments are

designed to gain an in depth look at the students' performance level using tasks that are instructionally relevant to the child, and based on tasks that would normally be expected as part of a curriculum. Only recently have these types of assessments been used by some states for high stakes purposes. These tests have many advantages over the usual multiple choice exam. They give more information about students, and are potentially more useful to teachers, and they measure higher order skills that are more difficult to assess with traditional paper and pencil tests. Portfolio and authentic assessments have several imposing disadvantages, however. In particular, they take more time to develop and implement. In addition, someone has to judge the students' responses and determine whether they meet the educational standards. The reliability of such judgments on a large-scale assessment program has yet to be established (Shepard, 1992).

Teachers, however, reported that they liked the portfolio assessments and thought that they were a valuable tool in gauging student progress, and many schools had expanded the portfolio program beyond the grades required by the state (Koretz, Linn, Dunbar, & Shepard. 1993, p. 1-2).

### **Summary**

Accountability through testing in schools across America has changed many things about education in elementary schools. Curriculum is being aligned to reflect what will be on the state test in the spring. Students are tested more frequently and at younger ages. Teachers feel compelled to align what they are

teaching in the classroom to reflect virtually the exact questions predicated to be asked of students on the state standardized test. Despite the continued emphasis on appropriate testing of elementary students by professional organizations, students continue to be drilled the better part of the school year to prepare for the test. This frenzy of activity designed to raise test scores is translating to increased pressure on elementary students, creating anxiety and stress and younger and younger ages. Teachers who in recent years were models of caring and autonomous pedagogy are being silenced by politicians, legislators, school officials and parents as accountability overtakes autonomy in schools across America.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

***“At a time when the traditional structures of caring have deteriorated, schools must become places where teachers and students live together, talk with each other, take delight in each other’s company. My guess is that when schools focus on what really matters in life, the cognitive ends we now pursue so painfully and artificially will be achieved somewhat more naturally...It is obvious that children will work harder and do things – even odd things like adding fractions – for people they love and trust.”***

**Noddings, (1988)**

#### **Phenomenological Inquiry and Pedagogical Thoughtfulness**

I took Max van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological approach to human science as a key reference for my methodological framework. This perspective on the representation of lived experience provides the template for the actual method chosen for my research study. van Manen (1990) suggests:

...when we raise questions, gather data, describe a phenomenon, and construct textual interpretations, we do so as researchers who stand in the world in a pedagogic way...pedagogy requires a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience...a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomena of the life world.... [and]...play with language in order to allow the research process of textual reflection to contribute to one's pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact (pp. 1-2).

These three elements—a phenomenological sensitivity to the lived experience of oneself and others, the hermeneutic activity of interpreting and making sense of that experience, and the symbolic activity of representing both the lived experience and my interpretations in writing—make up the research approach of human science in the service of teaching. Since my purposes in conducting the research were to more fully understand (through phenomenological sensitivity and hermeneutic reflection) the lived experience of myself and others in the environment created by testing, and to represent those understandings in written texts that would be accessible to other teachers, I believe that van Manen's methodological stance - this particular 'place to stand' - was appropriate to my purposes. My own lived experiences as a teacher contributed to my research as I viewed my experiences and those of others, making sense of interviews, stories, and my field notes. van Manen (1990) states “A good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience—is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience” (p.27). This circle of inquiry places the researcher as a contributing member of the study.

I chose to use qualitative research for my study. Through the tools of qualitative research, I used purposeful selection of respondents to interview, allowing questions to emerge from purposeful conversations, and I then examined the data for themes. Through the tools of survey research, I used data collection by surveying teachers who volunteered to take my survey. The survey was purposely directed toward two schools districts in my geographical area, in the event that respondents wished to contact me to volunteer personal stories or



experiences of testing. The questions in the survey were constructed in an effort to determine what, if any, the effects of class size, composition, or attitude of the educational environment toward testing might have on the behavior of students during testing.

For van Manen (1990), phenomenological research includes (1) the study of lived experience, (2) the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness, (3) the study of essences, (4) the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them, (5) the human scientific study of phenomena, (6) the attentive practice of thoughtfulness, (7) a search for what it means to be human, and (8) a poetizing activity (adapted from van Manen, 1990, pp. 8-13). The activity of writing is, itself, central to the process of hermeneutic phenomenological research: from a more traditional research perspective, the “real” research occurs in the field, and the “writing up” is a separate activity that represents the research. For van Manen, though, “Writing is our method” (1990, p. 124). “Writing”, he suggests:

...separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know...distances us from the life world, yet it also draws us more closely to the life world...decontextualises thought from practice and yet it returns thought to praxis. (1990, pp. 127-128).

van Manen relates that writing both abstracts and concretizes our understanding of the world: the process of putting our lived experience into words places it at once removed from the world, yet our stories have the ability to

capture experience in ways that are somehow more concrete-perhaps because more explicit-than unmediated experience.

### **Protocol Writing**

Much of human science research is human experiences, lived experiences. Describing these experiences in the most straightforward way is asking one to write down those experiences. The word “protocol” is a Greek word, referring to the first or original draft of writing. Protocol writing was used in this study to obtain lived experiences of testing. I described my own experience of testing children “from the inside” (van Manen, 1990) by writing down my experiences. I also kept field notes to record impressions and memories of testing as I interviewed participants.

### **Tact and Pedagogical Thoughtfulness**

van Manen's (1991) research approach and concerns are drawn very explicitly from his concern for pedagogy, something he defines quite broadly as "being educationally involved with children" (p. 3). In *The Tact of Teaching: the Meaning of Pedagogical Thoughtfulness*, van Manen outlines an integrated theory of pedagogy. Although this book is meant for a different audience than 'Researching Lived Experience' (1990), *The Tact of Teaching* is written for teachers rather than researchers, and uses appropriate language and forms of expression for that audience. The books share a central concern: that in our pedagogical practices and our scientific inquiry, tact and thoughtfulness are

essential qualities. van Manen (1991) is forthright in stating that these are moral issues as well as practical ones, and rejects unprincipled, value-free approaches to either inquiry or teaching:

To write about pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact touches on the dangerous presumption that one claims to know how to behave with moral superiority. By definition pedagogy is always concerned with the ability to distinguish between what is good and what is not good for children. Many educational thinkers are uncomfortable with this assumption; they try to pursue educational problems and questions in a value neutral or relativistic manner. It is wrong, however, to confuse pedagogical discourse with moral diatribe or preaching. Preaching is an act of moral exhortation on the basis of some unquestioned dogma. But pedagogy does not aim to deliver diatribe. Pedagogy is a practical discipline. On the one hand, educators need to show that in order to stand up for the welfare of children, one must be prepared to stand out and be criticized. On the other hand, pedagogy is a self-reflective activity that always must be willing to question critically what it does and what it stands for. (p. 10)

The construct of “thoughtfulness” or “tact” (van Manen uses the terms somewhat interchangeably, although “tact” seems broader) is two-edged:

...a new pedagogy of the theory and practice of living with children must know how to stand in a relationship of thoughtfulness and openness to children and young people...The pedagogy of living with children is an

ongoing project of renewal in a world that is constantly changing around us and continually being changed by us. (van Manen, 1991, p.3)

van Manen sees tact as including both of the common sense uses of the word “thoughtful”: (a) a considerate, empathic regard for the needs and ideas of another, and (b) a propensity for critical reflection. In order to behave tactfully or thoughtfully toward others, he suggests, it is necessary to be thoughtful about our experiences and ideas.

It is this idea of “thoughtfulness” that informs van Manen's methods for conducting inquiry into pedagogic situations and practices such as schooling and testing. As a teacher-researcher, my own stance within the school is pedagogic. My goal for this research was not to just record and document the changes that occur in children during testing, but to understand what the changes are and how I may better intervene to change the testing mandate or environment. As such, thoughtfulness was required of me during my research and considerations. First, it was necessary that I be thoughtful and tactful toward teachers and colleagues in trying to understand what it would mean to make changes to testing procedures. It was important that I carefully contemplate change with those involved, and that I make a sincere attempt at understanding their perspectives and understandings and expectations. Second, it was necessary for me to be critically reflective about my own assumptions, ideas and prejudices, and to be actively involved in reconstructing both my experiences in formal educational settings (as teacher and learner) and the rest of my beliefs and life history. van

Manen (1997) suggests an elemental methodical structure for hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenological inquiry. These are as follows:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (p. 31).

Using a form of interpretative inquiry, I examined how teachers view their students during testing, noting what if any changes occur that are not the usual behaviors of their students. My already-formed stance toward the testing of young children is in sync with van Manen's (1990) description of hermeneutic phenomenology as being "a philosophy of action always in a personal and situated sense. A person who turns toward phenomenological reflection does so out of personal engagement" (p. 154).

In this study, I also surveyed teachers of elementary classrooms who administer standardized tests to students. I was especially interested in teachers in K-2 who are required to conduct standardized testing of their students. While the questionnaire lends a quantitative flavor to one aspect of the study, it was included in an effort to broaden the data collection involving specific behaviors

and attitudes noted among children undergoing standardized testing. Through surveys and interviews of selected teachers and transcribed audio notes, I uncovered themes relating to the behavior of children during testing. Through these descriptions I gained a better understanding of how testing impacts student actions and behavior. As Pinar (1988) relates, “The measure of our openness which is needed to understand something is also a measure of its depthful nature. Rich descriptions, that explore the meaning of structures beyond what is immediately experienced, gain a dimension of depth” (p.19).

The phenomenological approach to documenting the behavior of children during testing was based on the presumption that I could obtain insightful descriptions of students and their teachers through the interpretation of the lived experiences of others. Phenomenology also uses data that is both the participant’s and investigators firsthand experience of the phenomenon. Phenomenological analysis attempts to set aside prior beliefs about a phenomenon of interest or study in order to contemplate the experience for itself (Merriam, 1998). The goal is to “arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced” (p. 159).

### **Identification of Participants**

I selected purposeful sampling as the method of obtaining participants for my research. Purposeful sampling seeks both similar and different data to maximize the range of information obtained (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

Patton (1990) believes that a small purposeful sample is useful when the context of the study is described and strengths and weaknesses of the study are addressed.

I first obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are properly protected. I requested permission from school districts, building principals, and classroom teachers to conduct this research. Teachers were selected for an interview by their administrator. The participants for interviews were nominated through this “gatekeeper” method of selection (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Gatekeepers for this study were the administrators in the public school system familiar with the issue of testing elementary students. Gatekeepers were asked to suggest names of teachers who have concerns with the impact of testing upon students. I selected two schools that I had formed professional relationships with, schools whose faculty members have indicated through informal discussions a similar concern and interest in the effects of testing on students. I sent the administrators of these schools letters requesting permission to post my survey to their ListServ to reach teachers in grades K-5. Through interview transcripts and transcribed audio notes, I uncovered themes relating to testing and children’s behavior during testing. A survey was posted to a nearby site of the National Writing Project Listserv, and to the Listserv of an urban and suburban school district reaching teachers in grades K-5. Teachers were invited to participate in the study on a voluntary basis by clicking on a web address

which contained the survey. 131 teachers visited the survey web address, and four teachers were interviewed.

## **Procedures**

### **Survey**

I surveyed teachers participating in the study to obtain a consensus of their view of behavior changes and attitudes that may occur during standardized testing of children. Survey research typically employs questionnaires and interviews to determine the opinions, attitudes, preferences, and perceptions of persons of interest to the researcher (Bork, Gall & Gall, 1993). In this study, I used a survey to determine the perceptions of teachers as they observe student behavior during testing time.

The survey methodology was chosen for this study for the following reasons.

1. To ask the same questions from all the participants in the study.
2. To use descriptive research for summarizing and analyzing collected data.
3. To report the results of each question with a larger number of inputs (Foddy, 2001).

Teachers were surveyed through an Internet web site that was submitted to both a suburban district and an urban district in Oklahoma. Additionally, the Writing



Project also gave permission for survey participation to be requested of teachers from a state university Writing Project.

## **Interviews**

I interviewed four teachers about their perceptions of testing and student behavior during testing occasions. The teachers were selected by their principals after meeting criteria I had outlined in the letter to them, criteria that included teaching since the year 2000, and teaching in grades 3 or 5, which have been traditional state testing grades. I engaged each teacher in a purposeful conversation about their background as a teacher and their memories of testing students prior to beginning the interview. After the interview, I transcribed the tapes and provided the respondent with a copy of his/her interview transcript (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993; van Manen, 1990). Member checks were inserted in the interview process for each respondent, as I took the data back to the respondents and asked them if the results were plausible (Merriam, 1988). Interview questions were focused on perceptions of student behavior before testing and after, as well as personal behavior changes that may or may not occur. Each interview was approximately one hour long, and I interviewed each participant one time in their classroom. The interviews were semi-structured following a script I had previously developed, asking follow-up questions as needed.

## **Trustworthiness**

The basic question regarding trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry is: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Criteria for trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **Credibility**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend a variety of strategies for improving the likelihood that findings and interpretations produced through naturalistic inquiry methods will be credible. Two of these strategies are peer debriefing and member checking.

**Peer debriefing.** Lincoln and Guba (1985), define peer debriefing as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p.308). I obtained the opinion(s) of a peer doctoral student and school administrator as I collected my research.

The emergent theory of naturalistic inquiry is dependent on a specific context and interactive dynamics, necessarily lowering the possibility and desirability of a focus on external validity, as compared with positivistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, naturalistic inquiry depends on a presentation of "solid descriptive

data," or "thick description" (Patton, 1990) to improve an analysis' transferability. In order to enable others wanting to apply the findings of this study to their own research to make an informed decision about whether to do so, thick description of the experiences and identity development of the participants, as well as the definitive exposition of the researcher was provided.

**Member checking.** Member checking is a process through which respondents verify data and the interpretations thereof (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each participant received a copy of our interview transcripts for review, clarification, and suggestions. Suggested changes were made, and transcripts re-sent for verification. All data was confirmed by this process. The question I asked each teacher that I interviewed was "Is this what the experience was really like?" (van Manen, p. 99)

**Transferability.** The emergent theory of naturalistic inquiry is dependent on a specific context and interactive dynamics, necessarily lowering the possibility and desirability of a focus on external validity, as compared with positivistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, naturalistic inquiry depends on a presentation of "solid descriptive data," or "thick description" (Patton, 1990) to improve an analysis' transferability. In order to enable others wanting to apply the findings of this study to their own research to make an informed decision about whether to do so, thick description of the experiences and identity development of the participants, as well as the definitive exposition of the researcher was provided.

**Dependability and Confirmability.** According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), both dependability and confirmability can be determined through one "properly managed" audit. To establish dependability, the auditor examines the process by which the various stages of the study, including analytic techniques, were conducted. The auditor determines whether this process was applicable to the research undertaken and whether it was applied consistently (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To illustrate confirmability, a record of the inquiry process, as well as copies of all taped interviews and discussions, notes from interviews and discussions, and hard copies of all transcriptions was maintained.

### **Data Analysis**

Collection of data began on the first day the survey became active online. Survey results were sent immediately to my email address as a respondent completed the survey. Respondents' email addresses were not revealed to me nor were they collected by Surveyconsole.com. Each respondent was assigned a number and the number is the only information about the respondent I received. The software of the survey site only enabled one response from an email address, preventing multiple submissions from the same respondent. Results of each survey flowed to an Excel database, collecting responses for later analysis of content. Interviews were conducted and transcribed into notes, with the resultant data analyzed for emergent themes.

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen (1993) have identified a process for establishing themes or categories:

1. Read the first entry of data. Set it aside as the first entry in the first category.
2. Read the second unit. If its content has the same tacit feel as the first entry, then add it to the same pile as the first. If not, then set it aside as the first entry in the second category.
3. Proceed in this fashion until all units have been assigned to categories. A miscellaneous category can be established and looked back through later to determine whether data included should be reassigned to one of the other categories.
4. Develop category titles or descriptive sentences or both that distinguishes each category from the others.
5. Start over. Repeat the process that has already been followed, making sure not to get confined to original categories. Allow new categories to emerge and old ones to be obsolete. (p.118)

van Manen (1990) describes the use of themes as “a reduction of the notion” (p.88). He lists a broader explanation to discovering themes: “1) the wholistic or sententious approach; 2) the selecting or highlighting approach; and 3) the detailed or line-by-line approach” (p. 92-93). I used the second approach described by van Manen, highlighting and identifying selected statements that seem to capture a particular theme. I then utilized the method described by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen (1993) to sort themes. Emergent themes were sorted into similar categories by noting each individual theme on a 3 x 5 card, and then sorting them into similar categories. The categories that emerged

constituted the data for this study, and represent as van Manen (1990) describes a process of thematic analysis. This act of “seeing” meaning made sense of the data by uncovering thematic aspects.

### **Design**

The research was a phenomenological study of ordinary life-world events, how teachers make sense of testing experiences and the behaviors of their students. For van Manen (1990), to do research is to come to know the world we live in. I wanted to explore the world and environment of testing and children, and in particular behavior of children during testing. Their teachers provided the lens into the classroom; my experiences provided the connection to them as a fellow researcher and participant. The data that emerged from the study appear in words rather than numbers. The words were collected from interviews and from surveys. Findings had some numerical base but were not statistical in nature. Rather, they served to strengthen or weaken a particular question or point. The information gathered from this study is not intended to be extrapolated to a total population or large group, but to try and capture meaning from particular moments in testing environments.

Data was gathered through interviews, a survey and my field notes while in the school interviewing. The information collected from the interviews was compared to the information from the structured survey that presented concepts of testing, such as room environment, curricular focus, and student behavior. In this study, the group (teachers) was targeted by me and sites selected for location and proximity to my place of work. However, participants could choose

not to participate in the online survey. Purposeful sampling of interviews was coordinated by contacting the principals of two different elementary schools in the districts that had approved participation in my study. Contact was in the form of a letter and a follow up phone call and email. Principals selected the interviews based only on my criteria that they had begun teaching in the year 2000 or before.

The data gathered was considered through a lens of “constant comparison” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to discover patterns. This was obtained by reviewing information from the interviews and surveys, coding it by using different colors of highlighters to identify reoccurring themes. My hope in conducting this study was that it in some way it might contribute to the basic knowledge of factors that may or may not affect students during testing time. Since student achievement is an outcome of testing, providing information that might better inform all stakeholders, including students, teachers, administrators, school board members, politicians, test makers and educational researchers is one goal of my study.

### **Participants**

The study had two aspects: an online survey of 63 teachers and interviews with four teachers. Two school districts were involved, an urban school district and a suburban district, with teachers in grades K-5 as participants. The urban district has a diverse blend of students, and has over 40,000 students in K-12. The suburban district has just under 7,000 students in K-12, and is comprised of primarily white, middle-class students. Two teachers were selected by their

principal from one school in each district to be interviewed. The principals were asked to find volunteers for the interviews that were teachers in either grades 3 or 5 who had been teaching since the year 2000 or before. All teachers interviewed were white and had been teaching at least 8 years. The schools were selected by me for convenience in location and for their differences in student composition. One elementary school serves primarily children from minority groups and has over 75 percent of its students on free and reduced lunch. The other school is located in the country and has less than 3 percent on free and reduced lunch and is primarily white in ethnicity. Teachers in K-5 from both districts were sent the link to the survey with a request from their district to volunteer to participate. I did not send the link directly to each teacher; the email went from me to the computer resource coordinator for each respective district. They in turn sent an email to the list serve for the district.

The survey was also posted to the list serve of a university Writing Project, an affiliate of the National Writing Project. I felt, based on my experience as a Writing Project Teacher Consultant, that teachers in the Writing Project would be inclined to reflect and participate in the study. Teachers on this list serve represented varied school compositions, years of experience, and background. The survey design did not provide any information which would enable me to identify participants' email address, school locations, or personal identities.

### **Interviews**

Although each interview was a unique experience, certain guidelines were used to direct the interview process. An interview script was used to conduct semi-



structured interviews. These guidelines were provided to the IRB as an interview script, and the script was used for all four of the interviews to ensure these initial questions were addressed to each participant. The interviews began with a short introduction of me, but without disclosing my own views on tests and testing. I discovered that while the same script and questions were used for each interview, each conversation had a life of its own, often with participants venting a bit about their views to tests and in particular standardized tests. Sometimes I did not need to ask the subsequent questions because they had already been answered in another response. On occasion the energy and flow of an interview redirected the sequencing of questions. Extended dialogue resulted on occasion from participants as they expounded on a particular thought. All of the interviews were taped and later transcribed by me. I shared the transcribed notes with participants so they could read through the text of their conversation to make sure I had accurately represented what they had said, and also to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. All participants were given my contact information as well those connected with my study at the university.

## Chapter 4

### FINDINGS

***"Our children are tested to an extent that is unprecedented in our history and unparalleled anywhere else in the world... The result is that most of today's discourse about education has been reduced to a crude series of monosyllables: 'Test scores are too low. Make them go up.'" Kohn, (2000).***

#### Introduction

In the current climate of testing, both state mandated tests and tests imposed by districts, it is important to understand the potential impact of testing on student behavior. This study attempted to look at the impact on student behavior during testing experiences through the eyes of their teachers. The study included an online survey of teachers in two urban and suburban districts and interviews with four teachers, two from an urban district and two from an independent, suburban district. After obtaining permissions from each of the district superintendents, an online questionnaire was sent electronically to the computer resource coordinator of each district. They in turn sent the link for the survey to elementary teachers in grades K through 5 in their respective districts. Teachers received the link in an email message from their computer resource coordinator which briefly described the purpose of the survey, the name of the primary researcher, and the survey link. Teachers who made the choice to participate then clicked on the link to the survey contained in the email. Prior to entering the survey questions, participants were presented the consent letter for the survey, and were able to proceed to the survey after indicating they had read the consent information. I

chose a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to my study because of the interpretive nature of its design in an attempt to determine the meaning behind the experiences of testing in the classroom. I drew upon my own experience as a teacher and my passion and involvement in organizations and positions that I feel embody best practice for young children. This study was implemented and designed from my own experiences of testing as a teacher and as a parent.

### **My Lived Experience**

I brought to this study my own experiences and memories about my students and what I observed them doing, saying, and sharing with me during testing experiences. While my experiences are not a directly planned component of my study, they still floated to the top of my consciousness as I interviewed teachers and read the surveys as they presented themselves to my computer via email. I view this essence of my pedagogical memories as a separate yet accessible layering of my lived experience in the environment of test giving. While the ultimate goal of a researcher is to observe and reflect upon the data collected without a personal bias, I find my personal bias difficult to ignore when it comes to best practice and testing of young children. Having a classroom of 24 unique, precious lives is undeniable to me as one the most important jobs I have ever had. However, I found that testing time became a time I experienced considerable stress when having to neatly label children into percentiles and categories such as below grade level, below average, gifted or not, ready for promotion or not as a result of their performance on a particular test.

Most of the time, one considers a high stakes test to be the state mandated test administered in the spring of each year. However, in this age of accountability schools are requiring tests at the end of periods of instruction, including reading level tests such as the STAR reading test every few months, Accelerated Reader tests, the Otis Lennon, district created measures of curriculum content, and then of course ongoing, regular classroom tests and assessments are ever present. The teachers I interviewed for this study could clearly connect not only with memories and reflections upon tests they administer in the classroom, but with clear impressions and memories of the state and district tests they had administered over their career as well.

*“Mrs. Landry, I forgot to bring my number 2 pencils! Does that mean I flunk this test?”*

Big tears filled Joey’s eyes. I handed him two fresh pencils from my desk. Other children around him clutched their own pencils a bit more tightly, an assurance to themselves that they possessed the tool needed to transmit the knowledge in their head to the paper in front of them. Another student, Emma, arrives late with a tardy slip in hand. She pokes the note at me and rushes to her seat, in its new location in a very straight row of desks. She blinks and looks around the classroom, which had been transformed overnight from a normal, colorful and comfortable second grade classroom to an environment reminiscent of a school room scene from *Little House on the Prairie*. Desks had been ungrouped and separated, bulletin boards emptied of all content and color, windows blackened

with bulletin board paper to eliminate distractions, all in accordance with policy coming from the front office.

I remember how I felt when the box arrived with the test materials in it. Everything was shrink-wrapped with security seals and warning labels about when and where contents could be opened. Past year test scores were identified and listed as the baseline, with frequent reminders coming in notes and emails to improve by 5 percent. All of this added to my over-all frustration and angst in knowing that eventually I would have to graph, sort and deliver results of this and other tests home to parents, scaring some and perhaps needlessly concerning others.

Squirm. Fidget. Yawn. Sigh. Eye rolls. Stomachaches. Crying. These were all behaviors I had observed in my own students during testing times. I wondered what other teachers were observing their students doing during testing time.

*“Can I go to the bathroom?”*

*“That was the recess bell. We missed recess?”*

*“Mrs. Landry, Hannah’s nose just started bleeding everywhere! Can I take her to the nurse?”*

These are the clear memories that float in and out of my thinking as I listened to teachers share with me their lived experiences with students during testing.

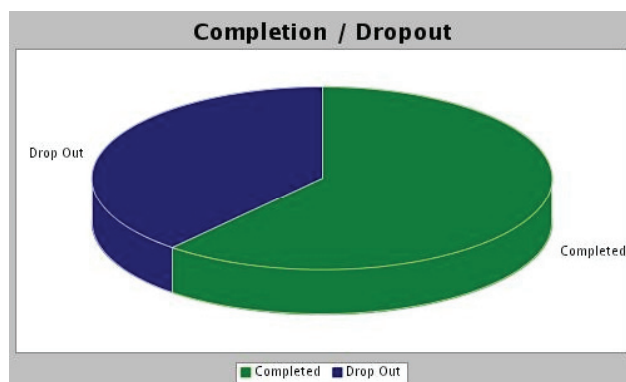
## **SURVEY RESULTS**

### **Teacher survey results**

The survey site was visited by 131 different teachers. Teachers were invited to participate in the survey portion of the study by an email request from the school computer resource teacher. Not all teachers elected to take the survey upon visiting the site. 93 teachers did agree to the consent terms presented in the opening script and began the survey. Of the 93 surveys that were begun by teachers, 63 were completed. The software for the survey, which was powered by [SurveyConsole.com](http://SurveyConsole.com), did not permit a participant to take the survey more than once from an IP address. Figure 1 indicates the completion rate of the survey. I speculate that the percentage of teachers who came to the site but did not complete the survey could be attributed to several factors. One is that teachers read the opening script and determined that they did not meet the requirements outlined in the opening script. Perhaps they were a reading teacher or a counselor or principal. The survey asked for teachers in K-5 to complete the survey. Since the survey was sent to the certified staff of an entire school building, it would have appeared on the email of all certified staff at the site. Participants were counted as a dropout if they clicked on the button agreeing to take the survey but did not finish every question. Another factor in the completion rate is that some surveys reflected a missed question. All questions had to be answered or it was scored as incomplete or a dropout. Finally, I experienced difficulties with the spam filter on my computer at home through my

Internet provider. This unexpected complication prevented some surveys from reaching me as initially the provider read the completed survey as “spam” and rejected the email. The completed surveys came to me in the form of an email from [SurveyConsole.com](http://SurveyConsole.com). Their data captured the number of participants who logged onto the survey, and my data reflects the number of completed surveys I received back.

**Figure 1. Completion/Dropout Rate**







**Part 1: Questions About My School and Class.** This section describes the school and climate surrounding testing.

**Question: Percentage of students in the class on free and reduced lunch:**

The intent of this question was to speculate on whether or not schools with a higher number of children on free and reduced lunch experienced more or fewer changes in behavior of children during testing. Figure 2 indicates that the majority of teachers participating in the survey were from schools where poverty was not an issue.

**Figure 2. Free and Reduced Lunch**


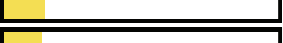


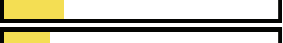


Free and Reduced Lunch				
#	Answer	Frequency	Percentage	
1	75% - 100%	10	15.87%	
2	50 % - 74%	8	12.70%	
3	25% - 49%	8	12.70%	
4	0% - 24%	37	58.73%	
Total		63	100%	

**Question: What grade level do you teach?**

This question asked teachers to indicate the grade level they taught. There were six choices for this question. Only one kindergarten teacher took the survey.

Most respondents were from grades 3 and 5, primarily considered testing grades for state standardized tests. Figure 3 reflects the analysis of results from this question. The range of grade levels reflects representation from every grade, K through 5.

**Figure 3. Grade Levels Taught**

Grade Levels Taught				
#	Answer	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Kindergarten	1	1.59%	
2	First Grade	10	15.87%	
3	Second Grade	9	14.29%	
4	Third Grade	11	17.46%	
5	Fourth Grade	7	11.11%	
6	Fifth Grade	14	22.22%	
7	Multi-Age (Indicate grades included)	11	17.46%	
Total		63	100%	



**Question: The results of standardized tests are used by my school to:**

This question was intended to capture the intent of testing as perceived by the teachers. Respondents could select more than one answer to this question, and could also provide other responses in the open comment section. Responses from the open comment section included the following information, and are exactly as provided by respondents:

1. Place in special reading classes.
2. Consider placement in summer services.
3. Place students into extra resource labs such as reading and math labs.
4. One of the items we use to place children in math or reading lab, but by no means the only one.
5. Placement for special services: Math lab, IRP, reading lab.
6. Remedial reading and remedial math.
7. Designate student eligible for services through the Reading Sufficiency Act.
8. Grouping students for reading recovery programs.
9. Give data to the public, both locally and statewide for political reasons.

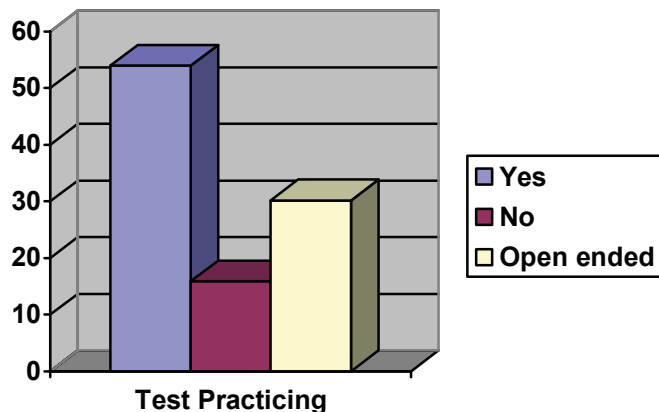
**Figure 4. Purposes of Standardized Tests at Schools**

Frequency Analysis			
#	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
1	Evaluate the curriculum and standards of the school	63	37.28%
2	Retain students	17	10.06%
3	Advance students	18	10.65%
4	Place students in gifted/talented programs	45	26.63%
5	Group students for the next year	15	8.88%
6	<a href="#">Other</a> – see open ended responses below	11	6.51%
<b>Total</b>		<b>169</b>	<b>100%</b>




**Question: Does your school mandate or plan practicing for the standardized test prior to students actually taking the test?**

Teachers could select from three choices to answer this question about preparing or practicing for the annual standardized test. Figures 5 and 6 indicate most teachers either were directed to practice for the standardized test or they choose to practice for their own reasons.

**Figure 5. Teachers Practicing for Standardized Test**



**Figure 6. Analysis of Teachers Practicing for Standardized Test**

Teachers Practicing for Standardized Test			
# Answer	Frequency Percentage		
1 Yes	34	53.97%	
2 No	10	15.87%	
3 My school doesn't direct me to, but I have my class practice taking a standardized test	19	30.16%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100%</b>	

**Question: How long do you spend with your class preparing for the test prior to testing week?**

Figure 7 contains the responses to a question concerning the number of hours teachers who do prepare for the test spends in test preparation. Results indicate that a significant amount of classroom time is spent in test preparation. While 33 percent of respondents reported spending five to ten hours in preparing for the state standardized test, 27 percent indicated in the open comment section that they begin preparing or practicing for the test from the first day of school, suggesting a curriculum aligned to the test from the beginning of the school year.

**Figure 7. Time Spent Practicing for the Test**

Time Spent Practicing for the Test			
#	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
1	None	5	7.81%
2	Two hours or less	14	21.88%
3	Two to Five Hours	7	10.94%
4	Five to Ten Hours	21	32.81%
5	<a href="#">Please write length of time if not identified above</a>	17	26.56%
<b>Total</b>		<b>64</b>	<b>100%</b>

Open ended responses to this question included the following comments and are as reported by respondents:

1. Geared toward the tests throughout the year.
2. On going.
3. We are constantly practicing.
4. 20 hours.
5. August-April (weeks).
6. continuously all year.
7. We are not teaching for the test so the answer would be all year.
8. All year long.
9. 2 to four hours per week until the test.
10. We are required to teach to the test from day 1 – all lessons must meet PASS objectives.
11. We do not give a test in first grade.
12. I teach half day kindergarten.
13. We practice test taking skills all year.

14. Weeks before the test.

15. Some everyday.

**Question: Does your school recognize classes or teachers as a result of standardized test scores?**

One does not have to look very far to find test score results from schools in areas across the United States. My community in northeastern Oklahoma features test scores from local schools in materials sent by realtors to prospective home buyers. Scores from school districts are posted on the state education website and are also reported to the community and parents annually in the district report card. This question was constructed to consider the different possible unexpected consequences of test scores. As shown in Figure 8, over one-half of teachers responding to the survey had no recognition or attention resultant from test scores produced by their students. This question permitted respondents to select more than one response; therefore the total number of responses is greater than the total number of participants in the survey. The open ended responses to the question were comprised of the following comments as provided by respondents:

1. Not as they should.
2. The school does not but the district does.
3. My school compiles the scores.
4. We do hear if some class has done exceptionally well and ask them to share strategies.

5. Our principal talks with us about our scores good or bad.
6. Scores are discussed in faculty meetings.

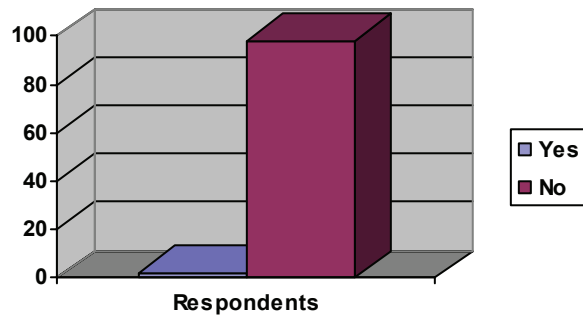
**Figure 8. Test Score Results**

Test Score Results			
#	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
1	Not at all	38	52.78%
2	All scores are posted at school	9	12.50%
3	Positive recognition for high test scores	13	18.06%
4	Punitive action or reprimand for low test scores	3	4.17%
5	Low performing classes are identified publicly	2	2.78%
6	<a href="#">Other</a>	7	9.72%
Total		72	100%

**Question: I believe a standardized test accurately measures the learning of every student in my class.**

Figures 9 and 10 reveal that most of the teachers surveyed do not believe a standardized test accurately measures the learning of every student in their class. It was amazing to me that all but one teacher that responded to the survey felt standardized tests did **not** accurately measure the learning of students, yet a significant number of teachers reported they begin teaching for the test from the beginning of the school year.

**Figure 9. Standardized Tests Measure Student Learning**



**Figure 10. Analysis of Standardized Tests Measure Student Learning**

Standardized Tests Measure Student Learning				
#	Answer	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Yes	1	1.89 %	
2	No	62	98.11%	
Total		63	100%	

**Question: How many students are in your class? (Please type in a number in the box below).**

Teachers typed in the actual number of students in their classroom to answer this question. Each answer was different. The class average size overall for respondents was 20. The smallest class size was 17, the largest class size was 26.

## **Part II. Student Behavior During Standardized Testing**

The final portion of the survey asked teachers reporting if they did or not observe specific behaviors in students during testing. The data from this section was analyzed by totaling the number of students, and then totaling each behavior observed by teachers. There were behaviors not listed on the survey that teachers commented on in the next question which contained an open response portion of the question. The behaviors observed (or not) were computed with the total number of students to gain a picture of the percentage of the total students represented by teachers that exhibiting these behaviors. Teachers could report more than one behavior observed by them during testing. Most reported behaviors that involved movement of some type, either of looking around the room, fidgeting, tapping of feet or using their breathing to sigh or moan. Some students stated to their teachers they were nervous, but even in the absence of words, behaviors certainly translated to nervousness. Students who looked about the room or at a neighbor's paper could also be exhibiting signs of "help me; I am not sure of what I am doing." Over twenty percent of teachers reported students laying their head down on their desk during testing. Figure 11 contains the responses from teachers on the question.



**Figure 11. Student Behavior During Testing**

<b>Student Behavior During Standardized Testing</b>	<b># Times observed</b>	<b>% of Total Students</b>
<b>Total Students=1058</b>		
Students wonder if they are going to pass	114	11%
Students look around the room	547	52%
Students play with their pencil	112	11%
Students ask if test will go in grade book or on report card	75	7%
Students complain of stomachache	30	3%
Students cry	20	2%
Students ask if answer is correct	62	6%
Students check the time	137	13%
Students are fidgety	520	49%
Students tap their feet	281	27%
Students try to hurry through test	331	31%
Students complain of a headache	124	12%
Students ask to go to the bathroom	176	17%
Students ask if they can go home yet	46	4%
Students worry about how hard the test is	344	33%
Students waste time	207	20%
Students chew on their nails	79	7%
Students stare out the window	97	9%
Students try to look at a neighbor's paper	146	14%
Students hands tremble or shake	32	3%
Students say they are nervous	222	21%
Students ask if they will get in trouble if they don't finish	81	8%
Students audibly sigh or moan	254	24%
Students grind their teeth	36	3%
Students lay their head down on the desk.	217	21%

**Part III. Describe Any Other Behaviors You Observe During Standardized Testing.**

Open ended responses to this question are listed below. Not every respondent provided comments on this portion of the survey. These comments are exactly as provided from their surveys:

- I am not a homeroom teacher. I do not give the tests but all of us prepare for the tests throughout the year. We gear everything to "The Test."
- Nervousness, anxiety.
- Sigh, cough, need drinks even though we just took break, complain that eyes hurt.
- Vomiting, scribbling on answer sheet, doodling on test booklet.
- Students will just fill in the bubbles.
- Students count the number of pages in the test booklet.
- Boredom. Not interested.
- Students saying "Do we have to do this whole book?"  
-filling in an answer w/o reading or listening to the question.
- Students will hold their finger up, which is an indication they need a tissue. They use this to break the monotony, I think, because I hand out more tissue during testing week than the whole year combined.
- 2 students have a hard time sitting quietly during the test. They want to converse.
- "I feel tired." (Sleepy)  
"Why do we have to do this?"
- Rushing through with out really reading the questions of reading passages.
- Since I go over most of this before the test, most don't ask me these questions. We do extra snacks and extra recess so my kids usually like testing days!!
- Finishing too soon. Just marking any answer to be first to finish.
- Chewing on lips tapping pencil chewing on pencil, wringing of hands.
- Staring off into space, tapping their pencils.
- Students don't read the stories or the questions. They just fill in answers. I've asked them if they read the story, they'll say, no. It could

be a 30 minute timed test and there are a high percentage finished in 10 minutes or less.

Students know they are in control and I have known of students who will manipulate the results by filling in incorrect answers.

- Talking
- I have had children wet their pants and vomit on their desks during an IOWA Test of Basic Skills! These were First Grade students in another school district.
- I see continuous nose-blowing, swinging legs, pulling hair, curling edges of test booklet, rubbing eyes, patting head, falling asleep, chewing eraser, purposefully breaking pencil lead, doodling, drawing on scrap paper (math), slouching in seat.
- Students are distracted by another student's behaviors.
- The more a student struggles with school work, the faster he or she completes the test. Students who figure out that the test is not actually timed have stalled getting finished, not because they were being careful, but maybe because they didn't want to go on to the next test??
- In regards to this survey: teachers at my school are not allowed to know who is on free or reduced lunch. Also, students are not allowed to use the restroom during testing. If students are prepared by the teacher (long) before the day of testing, most of the issues you are asking about do not occur at 5th grade. Hope this helps.
- The primary difficulty is not talking, as many of our learning activities are based on small group work. Also, peer tutoring is encouraged, so it becomes difficult for first graders to work individually during standardized tests. Also, many are still vocalizing sounds to assist with their reading skills.

**Summary.** The survey results indicated that teachers observed a wide range of behaviors during testing in their students. I listed many of the behaviors in the survey that I had observed in my own students during testing, and was interested whether or not other teachers observed similar or different behaviors in their students during testing. My memories of testing students wove in and out of the survey results, visualizing students writhing and squirming, anxious and concerned, crying and ill when the test booklets were produced in these 63 other

classrooms. While it was not a surprise to find the behaviors I had observed and others I had not in the respondent's classrooms, it was a surprise to discover an apparent difference in my attitude toward testing and the attitudes of teachers who responded to the survey. While all but one teacher did not believe a standardized test adequately measured the learning of their students, an overwhelming majority either was teaching to the test from the first day of school, or spending hours in preparing for the test. I uncovered similar attitudes from the four teachers I interviewed for this study. Their views are shared in the next section. This section is not a complete transcript of their interviews, but reflects excerpts of their interviews.

## **INTERVIEWS**

I walked into the urban school on a brisk winter day. There was a sharp contrast between the cold, stark outdoors and the warm inviting atmosphere present inside the school. Teacher one, who I shall call Megan, came to the office to get me and walked me down to her room. Once inside, I noted how neat, organized and colorful her room was. Cozy chairs invited reading in one area while bright charts provide motivation to "Read, ya'll." We settled in and I began my interview.

**Urban school. Teacher 1 (Megan). Resource teacher, 8 ½ years experience.**

**White female.**

**What preparation for tests do you make with your students, if any?**

We do some test preparation. I go to the Oklahoma State Department of Education Web site to download sample questions. I pull some their

examples and then I make some of my own test prep. Because I teach Special Education, they make some test prep questions through the reading mastery series and corrective reading series that we can use for that and test prep series that we can use, and then that, after a certain number of questions and going through the series, it is a form of test prep and we can use that. We discuss it, we say these things may be on it, of course \*\*\*\*\* public schools has four bench mark tests a year. They do that every quarter.

**Is that what they call end of instruction test?**

Yes, pretty much right after the quarter is what they should have learned during that quarter. I just try to make sure that they understand that it is coming, the big test in April, the benchmark tests each quarter, the reading tests, the Star math test. That is pretty much what I do.

**Do you have a definition of what a high stakes test is?**

To them or to me? I guess I think the state test that is once a year test that measures what you should have learned. The benchmark tests every quarter I do not consider as high stakes tests, this is the testing of our regular curriculum in our district.

**Has testing had any influence on the way you teach?**

Yes, huge amounts. I think in the back of your mind every time you are teaching, you have that going, that students will be tested at the end of the year. I feel like when I am sitting up there teaching vocabulary words, as an example, I need to point out to students that they need to remember

these because they will probably see them again on the test in the spring. I have been teaching for eight and a half years and it wasn't the same in the beginning of my career as it is now. It is now very important to teach things that will be on the test.

**What kind of interactions do you have with your students – I know you teach special ed classes, are they whole class, one on one in your approach.**

I have a special resource room pullout. I never have more than nine in any one group for instruction or for testing. I have my math group here at the horseshoe table with 4 or 5; however reading because of the schedule is usually a larger group. I have 1 on four, 1 on nine. I have 19 as a class size on my roster, but only see nine at a time.

**What behaviors do you notice in a child that might be nervous during a test?**

First, I try not to let them get to that point but I know that they do regardless. I see them staying on a specific problem for a long time. Last year I had a student who I felt was at a shut down point, it was just too much for her, and I said, "We have all the time we need for this test, get up, do some stretches, take a break." When they are shut down, you can see it in their faces, in the way they are acting. Even a couple of weeks before they take the test they begin asking questions, wondering and asking questions like what is this test about, will it be hard, is it for a grade. You can tell they are worried from the questions. On the other hand,

some students just don't care either. Some students shut down, some are really concerned, but those are students who are usually concerned about their progress anyway. But I see all aspects from shutting down to working really hard just to get it done. I repeat "its ok, you've got time, calm down." I provide reassurance.

**Do you see any differences in students who get nervous or concerned during a test and those who don't?**

Well, the ones who get nervous in some respects are my better students, because they tend to spend more time on test taking. I can picture one in my head in particular, I know he is very conscientious, and will take all the time he needs. I feel like the ones who are going to take all they time they need are possibly going to be the ones who do better unless it overtakes them, which sometimes it does.

**Do you notice any difference in student's behavior during testing time vice regular times in the classroom?**

I think they sense it from you, you know they see that they can't even rip the seal on the test booklet on their own, they can't touch the book, it is a big deal, on the test. So when its over, they are like "whew" I'm glad that is over. I feel like there is a totally different change in behavior in them from before the test begins and after it is all over.

**Do you notice a difference in the way boys and girls behave during a test?**

I really don't see a difference. There are certain students who might have an ADHD problem that intensifies their behavior problems during testing, but I don't see it as a girl-boy thing.

**Do students share anything about testing with you?**

I believe they feel more secure with me, as they know they will have all the time they need to take the test. They know it is not an issue of better treatment, but perhaps they are getting coddled a little more, and they are taking more time.

**Describe your behavior during testing time and in a regular classroom setting.**

It is more stressful for me during testing time and they know this. Even during the benchmark or end of instruction testing, they it is important because of what I say and how I act.

**Describe the effects of testing results on curriculum.**

I believe testing results are used to evaluate curriculum and to determine if adjustments need to be made. Perhaps if a subject such as poetry is shown as a low area on a test, then the curriculum might need to be changed accordingly.

**Describe the physical environment of your room during testing time.**

I don't really change much of the physical environment in terms of what is on the wall, but there is a change in desk arrangement and seating, and



there are people in the room to monitor that normally aren't here in the room.

**Please share any other thoughts you may wish to share about testing and student behavior.**

Students know it is an important time, obviously because of being told all year round about the test. They know it is a big deal; this is where our school is looked at. We teachers want students to know their scores matter, that they matter, and what they do is important. I try to let them know that it is important that we do this, it has to be important in their life. I remember taking tests as a child and the stress they brought. I tell them that you may not enjoy this but think about what it can mean for you for later things.

I left her room and traveled across the building through a maze of hallways to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade area of the school. Along the way, student work was proudly displayed on doors and bulletins boards. I saw no mention of the end of instruction tests that were going on that week or postings of scores of any type. Instead, colorful and seasonal work and projects were prominent near every classroom. I found my next classroom and walked into the room. Teacher two, whom I shall call Rachel, was energetically grading papers stacked around her on a kidney-shaped table. Her room featured windows overlooking a park area and evidence of a variety of stations and projects for students to engage in. Desks were grouped and walls cheerfully adorned with motivating quotes and posters.

**Teacher 2 Urban District (Rachel). 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade teacher, 16 years experience, white female.**

**How do you prepare students if at all for tests?**

Yes, I do prepare them. Our curriculum has review activities. We take the practice test for the state test, and we have a daily review worksheet for the test so they are exposed to the kinds of questions that will be on the test. We are preparing for tests and reviewing information every day.

**What is your definition of a high stakes test?**

Right now they are all high stakes tests! We have to disaggregate every score and break down data from the tests, so it all becomes high stakes.

Tests at my school are used for grouping, for placement, for advancement and for retention decisions.

**What influence has testing had, if any on the way you teach?**

You have got to teach them the way questions are going to be asked, the way they will be worded on the test. I do a lot of writing with my kids and sometimes they don't transfer the objective of the writing lesson quite the way I want them to. I find I have to be specific and go over the lesson again so they will know what it will look like on the test.

**How would describe normal interactions between you and your students?**

I am very nurturing and my students are very dependent on me. Several are considered very low and they don't have much self esteem, so I do a lot of building with them. I taught special Ed for 9 years so I know [how important it is]. They know I take care of them and they depend on me.

**How would you describe your students if they were nervous?**

There is a lot of pencil tapping and movement. I watch students just go down through the test and answer the questions without really looking at the answers.

**How are the students who don't get nervous different from those that do?**

They are calm, they just sit there, and they act like it is just another daily worksheet. They go through the test carefully and most are very meticulous. They want to get it right.

**Does the type of test seem to make a difference?**

Most of them are so used to testing now it doesn't seem to make a difference if it is the standardized test in the spring, an end of instruction test, or whatever. They have unit tests and math unit tests, STAR reading tests, all of which are similar to the big test. They are so used to taking tests that it does not matter what kind of test, it is a matter of business. If they get nervous on one test they get nervous on most all of them.

**Do you observe any differences between boys and girls behaviors during testing?**

I see more of the boys just going through it and just answering, not reading the test question. Girls are more careful and seem to take more time during testing.

**Do they share anything with you about testing?**

We talk about it as a group before we take the test and then after it, I meet with them to see how they felt about it and if they have any questions. I

ask them before the test if they nervous about it. They worry that they might have to repeat third grade if they don't do well on the test. I have to give them lots of reassurance.

**How does testing affect your behavior?**

I am stricter than I usually am during testing. That is really the only thing different about me because I want them to do well. The time factor of some tests makes me be stricter than I normally might be.

**What else would you like to share about your observations of students during testing?**

I notice many students haven't eaten before the test; they are hungry so I try to keep pretzels or something while they take the test. We don't serve breakfast here so I keep pretzels and cereal here anyway. I try to keep food on their desk that they can have during testing. The cafeteria does provide a nutritious snack during testing week.

**What curriculum changes if any result from testing?**

Absolutely there are changes. My school is trying very hard to get off of the list because of low test scores (this school was on the low performing list for the state last year). They make changes to the curriculum. Testing now drives everything. The first year we were able to try our own changes and have extra training. Next year the state comes in and then in a couple of years, the federal government will come in if we are still on the list. Schools in this district get rewards for most improved school and highest achieving school.

**Describe the environment of your room during testing.**

We have to move the desks so they are all in the row so the kids can't see each other. I have to make folders for them to work privately because they are used to working with each other because we do a lot of group work. During the big test week, I talk to them about getting lots of sleep and eating right. They know the results go to the \*\*\*\* center and the state. Many students worry that the test is going to go on their record or their report card.

**Are there any other changes in behavior of your students during testing that you would like to share?**

I noticed a difference when we were team teaching in our grade level. I noticed that students were more likely to take their time during testing with me on reading, since that is what I taught. If they tested with their homeroom teacher they just went through and marked answers. If they would have been with me I would have had them go back and take their time because I know them better on that subject. These kids all know me and trust me and aren't going to do something like just mark an answer. If I tell them "start again" they are going to go back through and check their work.

The next school I visited was located approximately 20 miles away, in a rural area of the county. Cows and horses grazed on the property adjacent to the school. Except for the parking lot in front of the school, the school was surrounded by large pasture areas. The school is the newest one of the district

and features large expanses of windows and glass to observe the natural setting of the area. As I walk back to my first interview, I notice the cafeteria has one end that is almost entirely glass, with a sweeping view of a large pond being visited by a flock of geese. I found teacher 3, “Charlize,” waiting for me in her room.

**Teacher 3, Charlize. Rural School. 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 15 years experience, white female.**

**How do you prepare your students for tests?**

I definitely, whether it is right or wrong, I teach for the test, until I cover those objectives that I feel that all the kids, my low, my average and my high, have a taste of [the test]. I usually take my high and teach a little beyond that if I know they can take the bait, because I know as a teacher that as those scores come up it makes a difference for the school system. Once I have those objectives taught, whether it is in a unit or after a test, I will enrich them with something fun, but I get my objectives covered. I will use calculators, or write checks, something fun to enrich but I definitely cover every single testing objective because the outcome is important to the district.

**What is your definition of a High Stakes Test?**

Well, it is any test really. But I guess I think it must mean the test in the spring. We start getting ready from the first day of school. It is a high stakes test for my students and for me. Teachers are looked at when

scores come out. The test scores also mean what classes students get to take when they go on to 6th grade.

**What do you believe is the best way to assess students?**

By watching them and listening to them. I really believe that. I think that it is probably a better indication on how a child does daily by watching them rather than just testing them once whether it is a state test or a classroom test, to see if they have the knowledge you have given them.

**How do students in your class behave during a test?**

Positively and negatively in my classroom. They react because in my class I weight tests as two grades, so I know they get nervous before they even get to the test. I probably do put them at ease once they begin testing because they usually do better on classroom tests than they do on daily work.

**Describe the environment of your classroom that is present during testing.**

I try to keep the environment of the classroom the same for about four weeks prior to the state tests. I arrange the desks and take things down off of the walls so they are used to it and they will learn to not rely on the classroom visual aids. I try to have peppermints on their desks with two sharpened pencils each day of the test. The room is spic and span clean. Because they make us take down everything for testing, I do try to replace it with something that has some life in it so it is positive but not too colorful to take their attention. I put Kleenex on their desk so they will not have to take time to ask for one. I try to provide an environment that is warm for

them because the state testing, whether it is 3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> because I've taught both levels. When I pass out those thick books for testing, they just look at me like "oh my." And even though I do not agree with state testing I know it is a part of my job that I have to give those [tests].

**What types of behavior do you notice in students during testing?**

I notice that they are perhaps just a little bit more careful, I think they check their work more often. I think they realize how important test grades are I think as I show them grades and discuss test averages they realize that if they have a borderline A or B or C that one answer can make a difference in their overall grade. I really don't see them being nervous in a classroom test. I do allow them to still come up and ask me questions if they need to during a test, to re-explain things or perhaps clarify a question. I don't ever just say "do the work" or "too bad, we've already covered this." They can still come up to me and I will give them little hints, or re-word it for them. The tests I give them I don't think are very stressful compared with state tests. During state tests, students that are comfortable with themselves and their knowledge, they seem to do fine. Those who are not comfortable get apprehensive. The knowledge of having the test makes them freeze up. I see them – they begin to read questions too many times. They try too hard; I can see them perched on the edge of their seat. They keep looking up and around the room. Still, usually at the end of the test, if they [students] are the ones not being



timed they will be the first ones lining up at the door because they know they can have extra time

**How else might the environment be different during testing time?**

Well, we offer breakfast during the state testing week. We only give one test in the morning, and then in the afternoon we play some type of reward game. Before the test we give them some type of snack.

**What behaviors do you observe in students during testing?**

Some swirl their hair, some spin their pencils, and many spin in their chairs! It seems to be whatever their regular classroom mannerisms are, they perform them times four, they do them more. They are also more tense or more nervous if they are usually nervous. I don't think that is bad because being nervous gives them adrenaline.

**What types of recognition, positive or negative are given to schools in your district?**

Yes, there is recognition, which puts pressure on teachers. I think the test scores in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades are used to look at the teachers, content areas, and schools. We really stress to our students to be here during testing week. If they are absent they will still have to take the test, but in the conference room with the counselor and different students from different classes. We want them here during that testing week because I think they will do better in the room with their own teacher. It is not a picture of comfort for them to have to take the test somewhere else – the conference room has just plain four walls, and they are with the counselor

not me I believe they would be nervous. Our district sends letters home about the tests, and our food service department sends notes home about snacks that will be served during test. Our school serves breakfast that week which is strange to me, because sometimes those kids who eat breakfast anyway come in and eat another breakfast which changes their whole pattern. That throws their morning off. I think if we are going to do breakfast we should do it all along. And some kids come in crying because they lost their money and they wanted breakfast and they are upset and you don't feel right about that either. It is great to have breakfast but it changes their routine and some kids can't afford breakfast and they feel left out.

There are other results from standardized tests [in the district]. I don't think testing for the gifted or learning disabled should be the only things used in deciding things in terms of retention or placement. I disagree that one test can reach all kids. There are different kinds of learners and different levels of learning. I hear of a national curriculum but it will not work for the same reasons. Some of the low help the high and some of the high help the low. Everyone has something to offer in a class and as a teacher in a classroom, the things I do for my students might not work for someone else. And the pattern, the way I get through my curriculum, may not work for every teacher. Plus, all of my classes are different every year, so I may begin at a different place or a different place in the book, instead of just beginning way back in the beginning or where someone

else says I need to be. Kids are different every year. You don't know what will work every year. You can't just open up last year's plan book and use that with a different group of kids.

**Please describe any differences in behavior noted between 3rd graders and 5<sup>th</sup> graders during testing, since you have experience teaching both grades while testing.**

You know, I think third graders are more concerned with pleasing the teacher and their parents, while 5<sup>th</sup> grade comes in more serious, they begin to develop that either I care or I don't care attitude. Fifth graders are emerging as individuals, where third graders seem to me to still be little boys and girls. I think it ridiculous to test kids in third grade and absolutely wrong to test in kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Those grades should be hands on curriculum and assessment performed the same way. I have seen a difference with my own children in elementary school; the things that I got to do when I was little have been taken away from them. Pencil and paper are now the way to teach curriculum and it should not be that way.

**What behaviors have you noticed in students during testing?**

I have seen young kids freeze up during a test; they start to scribble on the sides of the page or draw pictures. I do note on a pad that I keep during testing things I observe during testing, and I put the note in the file so if a test comes back low, I might have something to share with the parents about their child on test day. Students usually are fine, I try to put the parents into their child's place, make them think how they would react

to that kind of test, and how that child would have felt. Probably to this day, I would not ever become a better test taker myself.

**How is your behavior affected during testing?**

During testing, I think back to when I was a student. I felt stifled. I was not a good test taker. I was nervous when I took a test, just hearing the word test seemed to block information I needed. It would not come to me correctly. I would just lose the information, and then it would come back to me later. I think about how I felt about testing and then about the students, how important it is to them that they get it right and do their best.

**What kinds of things, if any do students share with you about testing?**

My observation of students is that they all want to score high. They talk about and ask questions about how the test will impact going on to sixth grade, who will know their score, what do the scores mean, and they have heard about their scores being ranked. There is a lot about testing in fifth grade that factors in. The test booklet is in one place, the answer sheet is in another, they can get on the wrong line. They can't think straight.

Testing – it is just all wrong.

The interview concluded and I gathered my materials to move on to the teacher 4, Julia. Her classroom was located at the far end of the building, in a new wing to the school that opened last year. Classrooms in this area were large, well-lit, and cheerfully adorned. Julia's classroom contained comfortable pieces of furniture and was decorated in a warm, inviting manner.

**Teacher 2, Julia. 3rd grade 11 years experience, white female. Her first four years were spent teaching in private Christian schools.**

**What preparations for tests do you make if any (the state test in the spring)?**

Test preparation consists of a lot of review. We start early so we don't overload them, sending home review packets that we make up. We play review games, we include review in our morning work, and we try and hit a little bit of it all prior to testing.

**What is your definition of a high stakes test?**

I really am not familiar with that term. I guess it would mean a test that really counts, so the scores better be high.

**What kind of influence has testing had on the way you teach?**

I don't get to be as creative with thematic units and fun activities like that. We do some, but our focus is on testing. I teach the way I think will be on the test. We try to have tests over content that are similar in appearance to a state tests that have multiple choice and bubbles to practice so that is not something new.

**What effects does testing have on your curriculum?**

A lot of the curriculum has test prep materials included now; this was a big push for selling the new math curriculum our district adopted this past spring. We cover it all, but again, the focus is on teaching what the test covers.

**What preparation for tests do you make with our students, if any?**

I make sure I cover all of the P.A.S.S. objectives. The district I came from recognized test scores. They tested early, and the scores came back before the school year was out. If you scored in a certain percentile, each child that scored in that certain percentile got to take off a whole day and go to Celebration Station. It made a difference. Some kids don't really take this kind of test serious so they try harder for the reward. They think of the test as a game, but this incentive at least got them to think about the test.

**What differences are there between your students in terms of behavior during a regular classroom test and the standardized test?**

Probably more I notice in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade more of a difference here in Oklahoma. We try to make the atmosphere fun during the days of testing week, when we finish testing we have extra snacks and extra recess. They know it is more important because we stress, "This really matters, this counts, try your best." I will even offer the whole class rewards, but I'm looking really to encourage a couple of students to really try. There is more anxiety during the week long standardized test, but that is usually with the kids that do well anyway and put more pressure on themselves. Some of the comment sheets I get back from parents at the first of the year about their students say they are worried about the big test. This is only week one and they are already thinking about that test. They know about the test from previous years in school, because everyone is cautioned to be quiet

because of testing, schedules are different. This causes them to worry. It is always the kids who are going to do really really well anyway that worry. They go through more anxiety.

**What differences do you note between the behavior of boys and girls during testing?**

Not really, not any real differences. The kids that get worried don't seem to be more girls than boys or vice versa.

**What is the environment of the classroom like during testing time?**

My classroom does not look different. I just have up basic stuff; I take down the multiplication chart and the fractions. We move our desks the same as everyone else. They do offer breakfast at our schools just during testing week. That is something different. They bring extra snacks in; we have snack breaks and drink breaks. We get them up to stretch and romp around. They like having breakfast and they make a big deal about having it, but I don't know how many do and don't normally eat breakfast to know if that is a big difference or not.

**What are the results of standardized tests used for?**

I think it reflects their learning to a high degree. I know there are always exceptions, you may have someone that is a really good guesser, but for the most part it does show their learning. It may be different if they have high test anxiety level, they may talk themselves out of a correct answer, but for the most part kids that are A or B students are going to score higher, and those that aren't will score lower. I think considering the test

scores should be a part of other things such as daily work, other test scores when it comes to retention and placement decisions.

**What other behaviors do you notice during testing?**

There are some things I don't understand as a teacher. Last year, our students scored very high, so I don't understand the pressure every year to improve. You have that same test with a different group of students. It would be, I would say it would be more meaningful to track that group of students as they move up, see if there is improvement from third grade to fifth grade. There might be some sort of correlation there. So those behaviors I don't understand. Most students who are conscientious about their grades will act worried about the test some. I wonder about the students who move around from school to school. I see kids moving from state to state, some come in high; some don't so you have to wonder why there is a difference. Students worry about catching up if they are behind.

**What if curriculums were more aligned? How do you feel about a national curriculum?**

I don't think it is a bad idea. My principal at my other school said something that made sense to me. She said you play the hand you are dealt. We have those kids six months in the room before we have to test them. I can't control what has been going on in their home, what kind of education they had before they came here. People who are offered incentives for how their school or students do are put in situations they may not want to be in.



**What is your behavior like during testing?**

Well of course I worry on the inside. I think about how they don't realize how important this really is. I think back to when I was in school. In elementary it probably wasn't so bad. I don't remember it being as big of a deal as it is now. Maybe it is because it seems to be such a bigger deal now. In high school I remember everyone filing in, getting a board and a number two pencil. That is it. Look at it now. Trips to Celebration Station and extra treats are all a part of testing.

**Any other observations of student behavior during testing?**

Just that it can be unfair for some.

**Merging the survey results with the interview results and my lived experience.**

The survey data provided a background for the teacher interviews. To develop a more complete picture of the effects of testing on the behavior of students, I needed data on what students did during testing, what the climate at schools was about test results, and how teachers perceived test preparation and test outcomes, among other things. The survey provided depth in terms of teacher perception, student behavior, and school attitudes toward testing. The survey results indicated that teachers do not feel a test defines their students, yet results from a different question indicate that they teach to the test almost from the first day of class. The class sizes among teachers surveyed and those interviewed were similar. Many of the respondents to the survey provided specific behaviors

they noted in students during testing. Teachers that I interviewed described similar behaviors in students but not in as specific detail. Teachers interviewed did give a clearer picture of the classroom physical environment during testing that was not resultant from the survey data. All four of the teachers changed the way their classroom looked and how students were seated during the week of standardized testing. Activities, games, and food were brought into the classroom during testing week that normally were not part of the classroom schedule. My reflections from interviewing teachers and viewing the environment of their room merged with my own memories of testing experiences with my students. I found similarities in what I had experienced and felt during testing and shared the feeling of helplessness that the teachers from the survey and those interviewed indicated.

### **Emergence of the themes**

The experiences described by teachers as they observed student behavior from a first-hand perspective was the substance from which themes developed. These experiences were combined from the teacher interviews and from the open-ended comment sections of the survey. The thoughtful, reflective grasping of what it is that designates a particular experience as special or significant (van Manen, 1990) was a framework used to uncover the meaning and essence in the experiences so that understanding could be facilitated (Manhole & Boyd, 1993; van Manen, 1990). This process included reflection on themes as well as explicating descriptions and validating the information discovered from teacher

surveys and interviews. The specific approach for reflecting on essential themes was:

- Survey open ended comments and transcribed interviews were uncovered from text.
- Thematic statements were identified and grouped with similar statements containing related meanings.
- Categories were identified from the meanings.
- Themes emerged from the categories.

The transcribed data was reviewed and compared to the original tapes and surveys to verify accuracy and completeness. After interview was transcribed, the transcript was verified for accuracy by reading it while listening to the tape. Selective reading also occurred during this time, and tapes, transcripts and surveys were read multiple times to determine if emergent themes were relative to the phenomenon. Copies of transcribed tapes were sent to the study participants to provide triangulation and to make sure the interviews were reflective of what they intended to say.

To organize and identify patterns and themes, I listed apparent themes and gave them a color, using a set of highlighters. There were six themes noted during this process: (1) teacher memories of testing, (2) helplessness, (3) accountability and curriculum, (4) community, (5) nurturing, and (6) changes. van Manen (1990) states:

“Thematic reflection has hermeneutic or interpretive power when it allows us to proceed with phenomenological descriptions. For example, when we

are interested in the phenomenology of reading a novel, we may soon notice some possible themes: (1) When we begin to read a book, we enter it, as it were. (2) Reading a novel means that we begin to care for the people who make up the novel. (3) While we read a story we experience action without having to act ourselves. (4) When we interrupt a book, we exit the world created by the word, etc. These kinds of themes are only fasteners, foci, or "knots" around which the "web" of a phenomenological description of the experience of "reading a novel" can be constructed." (p.90-91)

I created a file on my computer for each theme and recorded selections of each interview or survey item into the file. I worked through the material accumulated in each file, determining which statements to leave whole and which survey items to identify.

### **Theme 1: Teacher memories.**

The four teachers I interviewed closely identified with students during the experience of testing. One teacher recalled the number two pencils and military-like filing into the classroom:

Julia: Well of course I worry on the inside. I think about how they don't realize how important this really is. I think back to when I was in school. In elementary it probably wasn't so bad. I don't remember it being as big of a deal as it is now. Maybe it is because it seems to be such a bigger deal

now. In high school I remember everyone filing in, getting a board and a number two pencil. That is it. Look at it now. Trips to Celebration Station and extra treats.

Charlize remembers testing very clearly. She experienced anxiety type symptoms during testing.

I think back to when I was a student. I felt stifled. I was not a good test taker. I was nervous when I took a test, just hearing the word test blocked information I needed. It would not come to me correctly. I would just lose it and then it would come back to me later, therefore I would just do the best I could on the test. I think about that and then about the students, how important it is to them that they get it right and do their best.

Megan has memories of testing also:

I try to let them know that it is important that we do this; it has to be important in their life. I remember taking them as a child and the stress they brought, but my mother is a teacher, and tests are a big deal. They tell you it is a big deal, that your scores are going home, it wasn't as big a deal as it is now but it was important. I know it is a part of our society and we need accountability, and actually it is good in many ways, we have to take tests like the ACT and SAT to go on in life. I tell them that you may not enjoy this but think about what it can mean for you for later things.

While interviewing the teachers, I realized that I didn't have any clear memories, good or bad about testing or tests of any type. I grew up in a very rural community with a graduating class of 16. Testing was not a subject we talked about very much if at all. My first memory is taking the ACT and the incredibly long time it took just to get started. Testing did not become a negative reflection and memory for me until I watched my children both experience stress and anxiety on tests and I felt helpless as a parent in watching them struggle.

## **Theme 2: Helplessness**

Testing did not become a negative reflection and memory for me until I watched my children both experience stress and anxiety on tests and I felt helpless as a parent in watching them struggle. I experienced this same feeling of frustration and helplessness as a teacher, and even without an outward manifestation of a student through body movement or language, just seeing the haunted looks in my student's eyes as we tried to get through a test made me sick to my stomach. My own experiences from the testing of my children and my students left me with a feeling of helplessness. This theme emerged from the data of the survey and interviews. Two of the teachers interviewed reflect upon how their students appear helpless during testing:

Megan: When they are shut down, you can see it in their faces, in the way they are acting. You can tell they are worried.

Charlize: Those who are not comfortable get apprehensive. They knowledge of having the test makes them freeze up. I see them – they almost read it too many times. They keep looking up.

Open – ended comments from the survey also reflected a state of helplessness in students. Nine percent of students observed by teachers were staring out the window, and twenty one percent of students lay down their head on their desks, a sign of giving up or of feeling helpless. An additional sense of helplessness emerged from the teachers and their perspective on being resigned to teaching to the test despite the feeling that the test does not accurately measure student learning. 98.11 percent of teachers surveyed did not believe the standardized test accurately measure the learning of their students, yet all four teacher interviewed stated they teach for the test or prepare students for the test. Over 80 percent total of teachers surveyed also are teaching to the test, some from the first day of school.

### **Theme 3: Accountability and curriculum.**

Teachers that were interviewed communicated feeling a sense of accountability from the results of tests. Teachers who participated in the survey also indicated that they feel accountable for test results, and this accountability led to teaching to the test, creating a curriculum from test questions and anticipated format of questions. One teacher (Julia) mentions that she does not feel she can be creative in her teaching or use thematic units as a teaching strategy, as if creativity and integrated curriculums can't be assessed.

Megan: I think in the back of your mind every time you are teaching, you have that going on [in your mind], that they are going to be tested in the end. It is very key in what you teach to have the things that will be on the test.

Rachel: It almost has to be that you teach them the way questions are going to be asked, the way they will be worded.

Charlize: They look at the school for test. They look at the teachers, content areas, and test scores.

Julia: Testing has an influence on the way I teach. I don't get to be as creative with thematic units and fun stuff like that. We do some, but our focus is on testing.

Teachers participating in the survey indicated that 83.13 percent of them either are directed or choose to include some type of test preparation in the curriculum, although 52.18 percent of respondents did not receive any recognition from test scores, although scores for the school or district were public information. Teachers shared the attitude that testing is important and shapes the direction of the curriculum of the school or district, whether that is directly evident from their administrations or not. One teacher interviewed mentioned that test scores were the main reason for the textbook selection for their new math series:

Julia: A lot of the curriculum has test preparation materials included now, this was a big push for selling the new adopted math curriculum this past spring. We cover it all, but again, the focus is on teaching what the test covers.

Curricular decisions also were resultant from test scores. A low test score meant intervention from school district officials, the state, and potentially the federal government if scores did not improve at Rachel's school.



Rachel: My school is trying very hard to get off of the list so there are changes [in curriculum]. They come in and say “you are going to do this instead” with the curriculum. Testing drives everything.

#### **Theme 4: Community.**

The teachers that I interviewed all described a sense of community with their students and were committed to them to make testing a successful experience. They described times where they sat down and talked to students about tests and their importance, especially the standardized state test. They spoke of conversations with parents and children from the beginning of the year about “the test” and how to prepare. Students asked questions of their teachers about the test as indicated from both the interview and from the survey results. Students asked questions concerning test results and who would see them, would they go in the grade book, would they get to go on to the next grade? These questions came from the community of the class during meetings with their teachers. Teachers did this by reminding them to have a good night’s rest, bringing in food on their own for snacks, planning extra activities and play for testing week, and talking with students before and after testing.

Megan: I try to let them know that it [the test] is important in their life. We discuss the test; we talk about what may be on the test. Even for a couple of weeks before they take the test they are really asking questions, what is this test about, will it be hard, is it for a grade. You can tell they are worried. I repeat its ok, calm down.

Rachel: My students are very dependent on me. Several are very low and have little self esteem, so I do a lot of building. We talk about the test as a group before and after we take the test. I press them to see how they felt about it and if they have any questions. I don't want them to think that if they fail this test, third grade is going to be theirs again.

Charlize: They talk about and ask about how the test will affect going on to the sixth grade, who will know their score, and what do the scores mean? We talk about that. I emphasize that they want to do the best they can.

Julia: I stress during testing that this really matters, this counts, try your best. I will even offer the whole class a reward, even though I am really just looking for a couple of students to at least try. We try to make the atmosphere fun during the days of testing week.

### **Theme 5: Nurturing.**

Closely tied to the community that these teachers had with the students was the theme of nurturing those students through a successful testing experience. Testing and the anticipated stress that is resultant from testing was on the teacher's minds almost from the first day of school as they began teaching to the test. They talked to me about interjecting comments during instruction to bring students attention to a particular format or type of question, for example, "this might be on the test" was one comment I was provided. I discovered a common link among the four teachers interviewed, that these teachers believe that nurturing is the process of achieving student learning. Nurturing becomes creating an environment for their students where learning and achievement can

take place. Each teacher describes how important it was for students to be successful on the test or during a testing experience. They want students to be successful and their nurturing is enacted through different behaviors to advance students through the testing experience.

Megan: I pull examples for the test from the state web site and make up my own test preparation. I discuss it with them, saying these are the things that may be on the test. I have been teaching for eight and a half years and it wasn't the same then as it is now. It is key in what I do to teach the things that will be on the test. Students know that with me, they get more time and better treatment during testing. They see maybe they are getting coddled a little more; they are then taking more time on the test.

Rachel: I am very nurturing. My students are very dependent on me. I notice many students have not eaten before the test, so I try to keep pretzels or something for them to eat. We don't serve breakfast here, so I keep pretzels and cereal here, and try to keep food on their desk that they can have. These kids all know me and trust me and aren't going to do something like just mark an answer.

Charlize: I try to provide an environment that is warm for them because during state testing, when you pass out those thick books, they just look at you like "oh, my." I try to have peppermints on their desks with two sharpened pencils each day of the test.

Julia: We start early with test review. We send home review packets that we make up. We play review games, we include review in our morning work, and we try to hit little bit of it all by testing week.

Teachers that I interviewed believed that each could reach every student to help them prepare for the test. These teachers took test preparation and made it part of the learning environment. They emphasize achievement because it is important to the future of the students, and they nurture their students toward successful achievement on tests.

#### **Theme 6: Changes.**

Students experience stress during testing. Their behavior as observed by their teachers changed during testing. Teachers were surveyed and reported observing many behaviors in students that were different than their usual classroom behavior. Teachers reported how many students were in their class, and the total of 1,058 students was observed for changes in behavior during testing. The following changes and per cent of the 1,058 students that exhibited the behavior are listed in Figure 11:

**Figure 11. Student Behavior During Testing**

<b>Student Behavior During Standardized Testing</b>	<b># Times observed</b>	<b>% of Total Students</b>
<b>Total Students=1058</b>		
Students wonder if they are going to pass	114	11%
Students look around the room	547	52%
Students play with their pencil	112	11%
Students ask if test will go in grade book or on report card	75	7%
Students complain of stomachache	30	3%
Students cry	20	2%
Students ask if answer is correct	62	6%
Students check the time	137	13%
Students are fidgety	520	49%
Students tap their feet	281	27%
Students try to hurry through test	331	31%
Students complain of a headache	124	12%
Students ask to go to the bathroom	176	17%
Students ask if they can go home yet	46	4%
Students worry about how hard the test is	344	33%
Students waste time	207	20%
Students chew on their nails	79	7%
Students stare out the window	97	9%
Students try to look at a neighbors paper	146	14%
Students hands tremble or shake	32	3%
Students say they are nervous	222	21%
Students ask if they will get in trouble if they don't finish	81	8%
Students audibly sigh or moan	254	24%
Students grind their teeth	36	3%
Students lay their head down on the desk.	217	21%

There were many changes that were not on the survey that teachers observed in their students and provided to me in the form of open ended comments. They included vomiting on their tests, wetting their pants, disruptions for more tissue or bathroom breaks or drink breaks, marking any answer on the

test without reading the question, staring off into space, wringing their hands, pulling their hair, sleeping and talking. Even student who did not exhibit these behaviors were distracted by those students who were doing something different in class, with unknown impact on their testing environment. Teachers that were interviewed reported changes in their student's behavior during testing.

Megan: I notice them staying on a problem too long. When they are shut down, you can see it in their faces, in the way they are acting. You can tell they are worried. Some students don't care, some shut down, and some are really concerned. I keep repeating, it is ok; you have time, calm down. When the test is over, they are like, whew, I am glad that is over. I feel like there is a totally different change in behavior in them.

Rachel: Most of my students are very meticulous. They want to get it right. If they can't read the question, they get frustrated and can't go on, but if they can, they go right through it. They have so many tests that it does not seem to make a difference if it is the standardized test in the spring, an end of instruction test, unit test, star reading test, or whatever.

Charlize: I think they are a little bit more careful, they check their work more often. Students who are comfortable with their knowledge seem to do fine. Students who are not comfortable get apprehensive. The knowledge of the test makes them freeze up. They keep reading the questions too many times. They try too hard. They are perched on the edge of their seat. They keep looking up. Some swirl their hand, some spin their pencils. It seems to be mannerisms that they have in the regular

classroom, but times four. They do them more. I notice the students who are not being timed are the first ones to line up at the door. They are just more tense.

Julia: There is more anxiety during the week of testing, but usually it is with the kids that do well in class anyway, they put more pressure on themselves. Some are worried about the test from the first day of third grade. They remember from previous years that everyone has to be quiet during testing week, schedules are different and it is a big deal. It is always the kids that are going to do well anyway that worry. They go through more anxiety. Students who are conscious about their grades will worry about the test.

Other changes that were noted from the survey included the changes in the students' environment during testing. Every teacher interviewed was required to either take down classroom displays or to rearrange the room for testing week. Teachers comment on the room during testing.

Megan: I don't really change much of the physical environment in terms of what is on the walls, but I do change desk arrangement and seating. Plus, there are people in the room to monitor the test that normally aren't in here. That changes things, and students notice things are different.

Rachel: We have to move the desks so they are all in a row. So kids can't see each others papers, I have to make folders. They are used to working in groups with each other so I have to make privacy folders so they will work alone.

Charlize: I try to keep the arrangement of the classroom the same as it will be during testing about four weeks prior to the state tests. I arrange the desks and take things off of the walls so they are used to it. They will learn not to rely on the classroom visual aids. The room is spic and span clean. Because I have to take everything down for testing, I try to replace it with something that has life in it, so it is still positive but not too colorful or distracting. I try to provide an environment that is warm for them during testing.

Julia: My classroom does not look any different. I just have basic stuff up on the walls. I do take down the multiplication charts and the fractions.

We move our desks the same as everyone else. We get them up to stretch and romp around.

### **The Missing Themes**

I noticed that all but one teacher surveyed did not feel a standardized test accurately measured the learning of their students, representing 98.11 percent of teachers surveyed. Teachers interviewed also mentioned that watching their students was a better way to assess student learning. They mentioned their students were accustomed to working in groups on projects and had to have physical barriers to remind them of how to behave during a test by providing them privacy folders. However, the majority of teachers surveyed indicate that their efforts in the classroom were directed toward preparing for the state test. Teachers interviewed without question stated they begin preparing for the test from the first day of school, and teach for the test the entire school year until



testing is over. What is missing from my data is teacher autonomy. No one mentioned teaching the way they felt they were prepared as pre service teachers, or in accordance with their own teaching philosophy. Teachers did not mention being a part of any groups to counter the testing focus in their school or district. I found the theme of autonomy missing from my study.

I had also anticipated that gender might be significant in terms of student behavior and testing. The theme of gender also emerged as one that was negative or a non issue in this study. Teachers could not discern a difference between the behavior of boys or girls during testing, with the exception of one observation that boys tend to rush more through the test. Instead, boys and girls equally experienced stress and exhibited differing behaviors during testing.

Megan: I don't notice any difference between the behavior of boys and girls during testing. It does seem to depend on their behavior problems, if any. They are certain students who might have a problem with ADHD that intensifies during testing, but I don't see it as a boy-girl thing.

Rachel: I see boys just going through the test and answering questions, without reading the question.

Charlize: I see students being a little more careful during testing. Students that are comfortable with their knowledge do fine. Those who are not comfortable get apprehensive. Just the knowledge of the test makes them freeze up. It is the same whether they are boys or girls.

Julia: I don't notice any real differences between the behavior of boys during testing and the behavior of girls during testing. There is more

anxiety during the week of testing, but that is usually with the kids that do well anyway and put more pressure on themselves.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

**Schooling turns [students] into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher.... The more completely [the teacher] fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she [or he] is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are .... Education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor... the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits . (Freire, 1993 p. 53)**

#### **Discussion**

This study of teachers' perceptions of student behavior during testing sheds light on the effects of standardized testing and suggests recommendations for education and for further studies. As an advocate for alternative assessment and for constructivist teaching methodology, I feared that testing was driving learning into remote memorization and drill, disconnecting students from learning. My observations as a kindergarten and second grade teacher during testing and non testing situations found many teachers abandoning their autonomy and surrendering their will to teach as others dictate, not what they knew as best practice for children. I decided to pursue this study to understand how children's behavior might be impacted or changed during testing. I constructed an online survey to reach a variety of teachers, and I also interviewed teachers from area schools. The survey results indicate a representation from teachers in grades K-5, although kindergarten had only one teacher respond. The other grade levels were more adequately represented, with stronger respondents in grades 3 and 5.

Teachers interviewed represented grades 3 and 5, commonly the years standardized testing is conducted in elementary schools, although the mandates from *No Child Left Behind* have pushed testing into every grade level on a much more frequent basis. The question I had formed for the study was the following:

***What are the effects of standardized tests on student behavior as reported by their teachers?***

From this question, the following sub-questions developed:

- **What are differences in behavior during testing between girls and boys?**
- **What are the changes during testing in the behavior of children who come from homes of poverty?**
- **What are the connections between the teacher's behavior and the children's behavior during testing?**

Much of the media attention and research seems to focus on what is wrong with schools today and government intervention to fix what is wrong. What I have not seen in the popular press is what I have seen in the classroom, "What is tested gets taught." This aspect is receiving far less attention than it deserves. My research questions did not originally include this concern, but the data that emerged reflect a growing shift and acceptance by teachers toward this attitude.

### **Research Question**

My main research question, *what are the effects of testing on student behavior as observed by their teachers*, had a rich and distressing array of data emerge. High stakes tests were a part of every school that I came into contact with. Each

school was administering several tests throughout the year. Accelerated Reader (AR) tests were being conducted in classrooms on an individual basis. The STAR test as a part of AR were given to students four times a year to determine the reading level a student was currently on. The STAR test is also an individual test a student is administered on a computer, requiring approximately 45 minutes to an hour to conduct. Schools have also added a requirement for testing at the end of each period of instruction, which normally occurs on a 9 week basis and is in addition to regular classroom assessment. However, the test preparation or practicing mentioned by each teacher that I interviewed was in reference to the state standardized test administered in the spring of the school year. Each teacher I interviewed mentioned test preparation as a part of their curriculum, or directly stated that they teach to the test from the first day of school. While one teacher that I interviewed and one teacher responding to the survey indicated they felt the standardized test reflected the learning of a student, the rest did not. Why then do they feel compelled to align curriculum and teach to the very test they don't believe in? Teachers appear to have given up and surrendered to the idea of preparing instruction to fit the state test. No one mentioned speaking up or contacting legislators about best practice for their students. This is a disturbing aspect of this study that emerged without a simple explanation. However, since *No Child Left Behind* was implemented, it seems more and more teachers are abandoning what they know is best practice and surrendering to the pressure to prepare students for testing.

Students of teachers who participated in the surveys or interviews exhibited some the behaviors I had noticed in my students and many, many more. The behaviors that I had included in the survey concerning student behavior were behaviors that I had observed in my students during testing times. Students wrinkled their faces, sighed, cried, moaned, writhed, and generally appeared extremely uncomfortable during testing. These were behaviors that had concerned and disturbed me as a teacher, sensing the distress and worry that I as a teacher had inflicted upon students. I found that teachers responding to the survey reported many more behaviors on the open ended portion of the survey than I had included as an observed behavior. Teachers surveyed reported students that vomited on their tests, or wet their pants during a test. This clearly is not behavior that normally is observed by teachers. I wonder if they reported the incident to someone, or did they just assume it was normal behavior during testing.

The teachers I interviewed reported directly observing stress in their students, and of taking to steps to comfort or coddle them with words, food, candy, extra activities and recess. The interviews revealed teachers used other forms of nurturing to help students during testing. Modeling potential test questions for students and preparing students for what to expect on tests also further extended the role of teachers as nurturers. All four teachers engaged in behaviors that suggested they were nurturing teachers as described by Deiro (1996). They tried to create a safe, comforting environment during a time that was obviously going to be one of stress or an least some type of anxiety for their

students. Noddings (1992) views a school as one body and suggests that the entire school work toward fostering an environment of care and respect. These teachers all described how important it was to them that their students were successful on the test, and their nurturing during this time included creating an environment they felt would best prepare students.

This dissertation suggests that teachers are spending more time on test preparation activities and have either aligned the curriculum to test content directly or have had it done through district textbook selection or intervention from the school or district. On the surface, it might appear to be a good thing to have students prepared for the content and structure of the test. However, a closer look might reveal how extreme an approach some schools and teachers are taking to accomplish this. Actual preparation begins the year before the test, when scores are published by the state and made available to the public. My experiences as a teacher found that ground zero for testing was set for the next year as soon as test scores from the current year were released, usually at the beginning of the school year. Meetings and memos discussed possible ways to raise scores for the next school year. Curriculum and methods were either adopted or abandoned based on how we felt they contributed to the test scores of that year. Parents were offered testing advice at the first back to school night for the new year. Teachers I interviewed made it clear that they have the test on their mind all year long, and begin preparing their students from the first day of class. Megan mentioned downloading sample test questions to help students prepare. One might question, why not teach to the test if the test reflects the

curriculum, which is in turn reflective of student learning objectives outlined by the state. The problem is that focusing on testing specific subjects and content plays right into the hands of an industry that promotes test preparation.

Commercially prepared curriculum is closely tied to test preparation material, and the teachers I interviewed mentioned that their textbook adoption committees viewed potential materials in terms of what type of test preparation materials the teacher resource kit included. Alfie Kohn (2000) quotes that revenues from testing was over a billion dollars in 1999.

While teachers have made it clear that they teach to the test in their classrooms, the other types of assessment tools they may or may not use in their classrooms was not addressed by this study. I wondered if alternative assessments were used, or was every test or assessment administered one that in some way mirrored the format of the state standardized test. It was clear to me that either direct or indirect influences have caused these teachers to teach the objectives they felt would be on the state test, but it was not as clear if they did so in interactive, creative ways or in direct ways with worksheets. Some of the teachers mentioned teaching and presenting material as it would likely appear on the test, or sending home made up test packets to practice on. Future research might focus on the pedagogy that is impacted by focusing on standardized test scores for accountability purposes.

Considerable pressure is on the teachers I surveyed and interviewed to maintain and conserve test performance from past successful years. The pressure is indirect but very real from their administration. Test scores from all of



the schools were promptly disclosed and discussed at faculty meetings, although no one mentioned any negative consequences from specific percentages of a particular class or year. Memos or announcements were made in their schools describing how important the scores were and suggestions on how to improve or raise them. Despite high test scores, there is still a pressure to keep raising them up, something not understood by Julia, a teacher from a rural school that I interviewed. She shared that test scores were already high in previous years, so how could she be expected to keep raising the scores of her students? The pressure is on. High stakes testing outcomes such as those discussed in *Reading First* or *No Child Left Behind* provide little support or reason to change teaching methods if the resultant scores from a class are already successful or high. They just require raising scores from one year to the next, and they link funding to accomplish this by requiring school districts to adopt scientifically researched based curriculum (Manzo & Hoff, 2003).

Another question arising from my study is what is being missed from all of the hours spent on test preparation? Is it social studies, environmental studies, inquiry based learning? Aligning curriculum to the test suggests more class time for test taking techniques, reading comprehension, and math drill and kill skills. Less creative ways of teaching are likely in the classroom if teachers are required to use curriculum that is geared toward “raising test scores.” Teachers tend to feel the need to be more controlling and are less likely to allow activities that promote free thinking and discovery learning of students (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). My experience as a teacher was that my school began to purchase “out of

the box” scripted curriculum that required little thought or preparation by the teacher to implement. Other studies reveal that history, science, and the arts are being exterminated from the school day to permit more time to focus on reading and math (Manzo, 2005). A study that focuses on skills receiving more emphasis in classrooms and subjects being ignored would be appropriate to address this perceived shift in curricular focus.

### **Sub-questions**

Two of my sub-questions drew unexpected conclusions, with varied reasons for the surprising results. The first sub-question was concerned with differences that may or may not be present between boys and girls during testing. The evidence did not support a difference in behavior between boys and girls during testing. The study did bring out that if boys or girls were usually nervous or concerned about tests or performance in the regular classroom, then this behavior would likely be present during standardized testing, although it may be accelerated or intensified. Another sub-question concerned students from a perceived low socioeconomic level and their behavior during testing. Survey results indicated that 58.73 percent of the teachers responding were from schools where 25 percent or less of the students were on a free or reduced lunch. While it can not be determined from the results of this study that students from a lower socioeconomic level are impacted positively or negatively from testing, the results indicate that children from what can be perceived as middle socioeconomic levels certainly are. Teachers represented 1,058 students in this study, and there were many behaviors noted by teachers in their behavior.

The third sub-question was concerned with similarities between teacher and student behavior during testing. I found through teacher interviews that both students and teachers are undergoing stress, and teachers are concerned with the stress they see in students and they take measures to provide comfort when possible. Teachers did not discuss how they deal with the stress they encounter in testing situations or from the stress of how the performance of their students impacts their image and reputation.

### **Implications**

One implication from this study is that teachers are feeling helpless as testing mandates are implemented, causing them to offer no resistance to the push to test. Teachers surveyed overwhelmingly indicated that a standardized test does not accurately measure the learning of their students, but also indicated to a large degree that they are teaching to the test, some from the first day of school. No evidence was discovered in this study that teachers were exercising autonomy in their belief that alternate measures in testing were more appropriate for their students. No one mentioned writing a letter to a school official, or joining an advocacy group, or even suggesting that perhaps they could stop this change in the way schools are focusing educational efforts. I believe that many teachers today are voting with their feet: they are leaving and moving out of the teaching profession. The tension that the teachers I interviewed conveyed to me was almost palatable. An indirect consequence of high stakes testing is that teachers with experience are leaving the field because it simply is too hard to overcome what is happening in classrooms across the United States, and is driving

teachers out of the field (Kohn, 2000). If accountability standards are leading to standardization of curriculum as the teachers I interviewed suggest is happening, then creativity and flexibility in teaching are bound to suffer. There is nothing wrong with high expectations in classrooms. However, causing teachers to anticipate potential professional embarrassment from student test scores is not a good way to promote professional accountability. Teachers should be held to high standards, but measuring teacher accountability through student test scores creates feelings of helplessness in teachers. The fact that so many of the teachers responding to the survey indicate they teach to the test suggests that teachers have finally either given up or have worn down to accept these tests as inevitable. The motivation and push to perform and achieve has indeed had consequences and high stakes, the silent surrender of the professional teaching community. Teachers are concerned with jobs and public criticisms as scores are posted for their district. They feel they have no voice or no choice but to implement strategies and curriculums pushed down from administration. Most teachers reported in the survey that their district takes no action from test scores, unless they are low. However, all test scores are part of the district report card and are available from the state education web site. Teachers, students, and parents are accepting test scores as a personal label because of the public attention they receive.

This thinking reminds me of my daughters when they had an annual piano recital. Even though they had studied music and the piano for an entire year, much of the focus on the last portion of their year was spent on preparing the

recital piece, practicing over and over each note and part of the composition. I found they didn't want to practice anything else until the recital was over. With the focus on the performance, many beautiful songs and attempts to play other music were abandoned. But the minute the recital was over, out came the other music and attempts began once again at creating their own songs. They played to hear the music, not to play to perfection a piece selected by someone else. I didn't have to tell them to play; they enjoyed playing their choices of music and frequently sat down at odd times to hammer out something that came across their mind.

High stakes testing and standardized tests are reducing the "music" of our students as they are forced to memorize the same piece for the spring recital.

Another theme from this study is that the scope of the curriculum is being reduced, as there is little value in the minds of teachers to move beyond what is on the test until after testing is over. Student interest is not considered in schools, and motivation to learn is replaced by rewards for high test scores, and even trips to pizza parlors and amusement parks, as reported by Julia in her interview. The spirit of learning is disappearing, being replaced with tasks like practicing filling in test bubbles or writing to specific prompts only. What then becomes an issue is the message and vision of the student. Students have so many meaningful thoughts and ideas to explore. They have contributions and value, but gradually this is being overlooked or deemphasized as more clinical approaches to instruction are implemented. It is possible many students will shut

down before the test comes, creativity disappearing with them as they leave school, creating a feeling of despair.

Stress and behavior changes were also a theme from this study, with many changes noted in behavior of students during testing. Many of these behaviors suggest significant levels of helplessness, fear, abandonment, and self-doubt during testing situations. Even if students hadn't been warned for months or years about upcoming tests, the interviews suggest that the classroom environment changes considerably during testing. What were friendly and warm rooms as I viewed them during the interviews are largely stripped of their identity and uniqueness. Children walk into their class on the first day of testing week wondering where their familiar classroom went. Walls have been stripped of familiar posters and charts. Desks are ungrouped and separated into neat rows. This sterile atmosphere is accompanied by climate changes as well. I know my school would suggest a temperature that was approximately 68 degrees, in the hope cooler temperatures would increase alertness. Windows were covered with black bulletin board paper to keep students from being distracted or staring out the window. While some of these changes may be required by a district or school for tests, suddenly inflicting them upon students can potentially have negative effects on students.

### **Recommendations**

The purpose of my study was to determine the effects of testing on student behavior as observed by their teachers. This sample size was adequate for my study, but it could provide a richer view of students if expanded to a study of

students across the state or nation. Online surveys make it possible to reach most teachers in schools of this country and could be a tool used in further research on this subject. No teacher that I interviewed stated that they were opposed to the idea of accountability, but they did state that they did not feel standardized testing was an adequate way to assess their students. Many teachers in the survey and from interviews felt that testing has created a curriculum of its own.

The silence of teachers gives implied consent to the testing process, but I encountered many teachers opposed to testing. However, whether from concerns for job or from concerns about how to voice concerns, no one is saying anything professionally. What is taking place in schools is that the test is driving to an unbelievable degree what is being taught in the classroom. As more and more teachers “help” students perform well on the test, they incorporate more and more test-taking strategies as important content areas. It is the focus of instruction for most of the school year. Teachers on text book selection committees buy into the notion that a textbook is better if the producers of the materials provide information that test scores will improve if the materials are purchased and used. Teachers are not very likely to incorporate student choices in learning or to promote inquiry based learning at least until the state tests are over. Teachers need more research to document this trend and to provide alternative ways to prepare students for tests while considering their interests and thinking.

Professional development is suggested to reflect a more rounded approach to students instead of focusing on training designed to raise test scores. Teachers need opportunities to collaborate, reflect, and grow as teachers, either with other teachers on site or in other buildings. Thinking with other professionals might help strengthen their own beliefs about best practice for students and how to effect those practices in pedagogically meaningful ways. Many professional development seminars I have attended did not create any development at all. The training was usually a one-way method of sharing instruction on how to raise student test scores or how to bolster up student writing samples or math computation skills. These to me were deliberate events planned to convey a message about testing and test preparation. Teachers perceive from this type of training that they are powerless and are afraid to speak out.

There is a need for teachers to realize their perspectives are important and their voice should be included as a part of implementing change in the classroom. Teachers could benefit from joining or creating focus groups centered on best practice for students, both in curricular decisions and those concerning assessment. Alfie Kohn (2000) outlines in his book *The Case Against Standardized Testing* many actions that teachers could take to make a difference in the approach taking in assessing students. He suggests that “drastic action is needed to face the educational emergency we are facing in this country.” Further research could better document what it is that keeps teachers from expressing their views and opinions on training, testing, and staff development.



The climate of high stakes tests undoubtedly translates to increased student anxiety and self-doubt. Students are grouped, labeled, remediated, and tracked as a result of test scores. It was not clear from this study what expectations were held by parents of students being tested by teachers. Further research might document behavior changes noted in students at home and at school during testing, and also ask students to reflect on their self concept during testing.

My recommendation for school administrators is to not pressure teachers for continual high test scores. Rather, the focus should be on using multiple assessments, portfolios, and teacher observations, not just a standardized test score. The environment of the school and individual classroom should be reflective of a nurturing, supportive climate, not one that becomes sterile and unrecognizable during testing week. This can cause unintended anxiety in students and sends a subliminal message of increased importance on this one test.

Recommendations for further research include studies on teacher memories of testing, teachers coping with stress from high stakes tests, or whether stress from high stakes testing is causing teachers to leave the teaching profession. A comparison of teacher's job satisfaction from ten years ago to job satisfaction experienced by teachers today might reveal the impact of high stakes testing on the teaching profession.

My own research will continue to explore how to implement other forms of assessment as acceptable with current mandates that are in place. The voices of my former elementary students, my children, and the children I heard through

their teachers in this study prompt me to continue to advocate for best practices in education. A possible interpretation of this study might be that teaching has been transformed by the testing agenda from one that focuses on a human, caring relationship to one that is a mechanical, factory modeled practice that turns out . It is my hope that as this and other studies highlight the lack of teacher voice and autonomy in testing that educators realize their attitudes and ideas are shared by others, and that they will discover their voice as an advocate to express and act on their professional thoughts. No one wants a vision of a darkened classroom filled with rows of desks and children spending hours filling in bubbles. Rather, a vision of a classroom that celebrates imagination, lived experiences, and freedom from the bell curve is a brighter and more hopeful one. It is critical to those we as educators love best, our students, to step forward and advocate for the children we nurture and love.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board**

Date: Monday, November 08, 2004

IRB Application No: **ED0536**

Proposal Title: Teacher's Perceptions of Student Behavior During Testing

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 11/7/2005**

Principal  
Investigator

Deborah E. Landry  
10540 N. 205th East Ave.  
Claremore, OK 74019

Kathryn Castle  
235 Willard  
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR46.

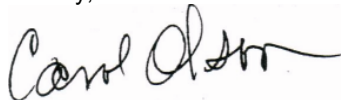
The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact me in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-1676, colson@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Carol Olson, Chair Institutional Review Board
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## APPENDIX B

### ONLINE SURVEY

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Hello:

You are invited to participate in our survey , *Teacher's Perception of Student Behavior During Testing*. In this survey, approximately 100 people will be asked to complete a survey that asks questions about testing. It will take approximately 5 to 7 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point. It is very important for us to learn your opinions.

Your survey responses will be strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate. Your information will be coded and will remain confidential. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Deborah Landry by email at [teach4life@aol.com](mailto:teach4life@aol.com)

A. AUTHORIZATION By clicking the submit button below to begin the survey, I hereby authorize or direct Deborah Landry to perform the following research:

1. Name of research project: Teacher's Perception of Student Behavior during Testing.
2. This study is being conducted through Oklahoma State University. The principal researcher is Deborah Landry, a doctoral student in the College of Education, School of Teaching and Educational Leadership.
3. The purpose of the research is to review changes which may occur in student behavior as observed by the teacher. The expected duration of the subject's participation is approximately 5-7 minutes.
4. Respondents will be required to complete a survey about behavior observed during testing.
5. No procedures involved in this study are considered experimental in nature.
6. No reasonably foreseeable risks or discomfort to the subject are anticipated during the course of this study.
- . Respondents may gain insight into how testing impacts their student's behavior. This information may or may not shape future decisions about the

effects of testing in his or her own classroom.

8. The respondent's name will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in place of names and schools for reporting purposes if they should be provided. The researcher will protect the confidentiality of respondents to the maximum extent possible.

9. Explanation of how and whom to contact about: a. For questions about the research: Contact Deborah Landry at [teach4life@aol.com](mailto:teach4life@aol.com), or Dr. Kathryn Castle, advisor, at [kca1084@okstate.edu](mailto:kca1084@okstate.edu).

B. For questions about research subjects' rights: Contact the IRB office: Oklahoma State University, 415 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078. Phone 405-744 5700. c. Additional contact: Dr. Carol Olson, IRB Chair, Oklahoma State University, 415 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078. Phone 405 744 5700,

C. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I will not be penalized if I choose not to participate. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and end my participation in this project at any time without penalty after I notify the project director, Deborah Landry. I may reach her via e-mail at [teach4life@aol.com](mailto:teach4life@aol.com), or writing at P. O. Box 2135, Owasso, OK 74055.

D. INFORMED CONSENT, I have read and fully understand the informed consent outlined in the preceding text. I understand I am free to withdraw my consent and end my participation at any time without penalty by exiting the survey. I may exit the survey at any time by pressing exit or the esc key. To consent to take this survey, please click on the continue button. If you do not consent please press ESC now to exit.

Thank you very much for your time and support. Please start with the survey now by clicking on the **Continue** button below.

To the teachers participating in this survey: Thank you for taking the time and effort to respond to this questionnaire. This research is being conducted in an attempt to determine a teacher's perception of student behavior during testing. I, Deborah Landry am the principal researcher in this project, and am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University. Respondents are asked to complete the survey which follows this introduction. Personal information about participants such as email addresses will not be retained or used by me.

Please give your most candid and thorough response to the questions below. Rest assured that the information you share here is confidential. Your privacy is valued and every effort has been made to protect the information you provide. Please note that you will be permitted to complete only one survey to maintain the integrity of the survey. Contact me at the email address following this survey with any concerns or questions. You may exit the survey at any time if you change your mind about participating in my survey. For questions about this research, contact Deborah Landry at [teach4life@aol.com](mailto:teach4life@aol.com).

The survey is divided into two sections: -

1. Questions about my school and class
2. Student behavior during testing

**Please try to complete the survey by [November 30, 2004].**

#### **I. Questions about my school and class.**

Percentage of students in the class on free and reduced lunch:

- ☐ 75% - 100%
- ☐ 50 % - 74%
- ☐ 25% - 49%
- ☐ 0% - 24%

What grade level do you teach?

- ☐ Kindergarten
- ☐ First Grade
- ☐ Second Grade
- ☐ Third Grade
- ☐ Fourth Grade

- ☐ Fifth Grade
- ☐ Multi-Age (Indicate grades included)

Check as many that may apply.  
The results of standardized tests are used by my school to:

- ☐ Evaluate the curriculum and standards of the school
- ☐ Retain students
- ☐ Advance students
- ☐ Place students in gifted/talented programs
- ☐ Group students for the next year
- ☐ Other -

Does your school mandate or plan practicing for the standardized test prior to students actually taking the test?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐
- ☐ No
- ☐
- ☐ My school doesn't direct me to, but I have my class practice taking a standardized test

How long do you spend with your class preparing for the test prior to testing week?



- ☐ None
- ☐ Two hours or less
- ☐ Two to Five Hours
- ☐ Five to Ten Hours
- ☐ Please write length of time if not identified above

Does your school recognize classes or teachers as a result of standardized test scores?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ All scores are posted at school
- ☐ Positive recognition for high test scores
- ☐ Punitive action or reprimand for low test scores
- ☐ Low performing classes are identified publicly
- ☐ Other

I believe a standardized test accurately measures the learning of every student in my class.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐
- ☐ No
- ☐

How many students are in your class? (Please type in a number in the box below.)

## II. Student Behavior During Standardized Testing

	Number of students demonstrating this behavior.
Students wonder out loud if they are going to pass	<input type="text"/>
Students look around the room	<input type="text"/>
Students play with their pencil	<input type="text"/>
Students ask if this test will go in the grade book or report card	<input type="text"/>

Number of  
students  
demonstrating  
this behavior.

Students complain of a stomachache	<input type="text"/>
---------------------------------------	----------------------

Students cry	<input type="text"/>
--------------	----------------------

Students ask if an answer is correct	<input type="text"/>
---	----------------------

Number of  
students  
demonstrating  
this behavior.

Students check the time	<input type="text"/>
----------------------------	----------------------

Students are fidgety	<input type="text"/>
-------------------------	----------------------

Students tap their feet	<input type="text"/>
----------------------------	----------------------

Number of  
students  
demonstrating  
this behavior.

Students try to hurry through test	<input type="text"/>
---------------------------------------	----------------------

Students complain of a headache	<input type="text"/>
------------------------------------	----------------------

Students ask to go to the bathroom	<input type="text"/>
---------------------------------------	----------------------



Number of  
students  
demonstrating  
this behavior.

Students ask if they can go home yet	<input type="text"/>
--------------------------------------	----------------------

Students worry about how hard the test is	<input type="text"/>
---	----------------------

Students waste time	<input type="text"/>
---------------------	----------------------



Number of  
students  
demonstrating  
this behavior.

Students chew on their nails	<input type="text"/>
------------------------------	----------------------

Students stare out the window	<input type="text"/>
-------------------------------	----------------------

Students try to look at a neighbor's paper	<input type="text"/>
--	----------------------



Number of  
students  
demonstrating  
this behavior.

Student's hands tremble or shake	<input type="text"/>
----------------------------------	----------------------

Students say they are nervous	<input type="text"/>
-------------------------------	----------------------

Students ask if they will get in trouble if they don't finish	<input type="text"/>
---	----------------------

Number of  
students  
demonstrating  
this behavior.

Students audibly sigh or  
moan

Students grind their teeth

Students lay their head down  
on the desk

Describe any other behaviors you observe during standardized testing.

Thank you for completing the survey. Please contact [teach4life@aol.com](mailto:teach4life@aol.com) if  
you have any questions regarding this survey.



Online Surveys Powered By [SurveyConsole Survey Software](#)

## **APPENDIX C**

### **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS**

#### **Urban School**

Teacher 1

**Hello, I am Deborah Landry, at doctoral student at Oklahoma State, and your principal provided me with your name as someone who would participate in my study about teacher perception of student behavior during testing. So I've surveyed approximately 100 teachers via the Internet. It will take approximately 45 minutes to conduct the interview.**

**What preparation for tests do you make with your students, if any?**

I do, we do some test preparation. I go to the Oklahoma State Dept of Education Web site to download. I pull some their examples and then I make some of my own test prep. Because I teach Special Ed, they make some test prep questions through the reading mastery series and corrective reading series that we can use for that and test prep series that we can use, and then that, after a certain number of questions and going through the series, it is a form of test prep and we can use that. We discuss it, we say these things may be on it, of course \*\*\*\*\* public schools has four bench mark tests a year. They do that every quarter.

**Is that what they call end of instruction test?**

Yes, pretty much right after the quarter is what they should have learned during that quarter. I just try to make sure that they understand that it is coming, the big test in April, the benchmark tests each quarter, the reading tests, the Star math test. That is pretty much what I do.

**Do you have a definition of what a high stakes test is?**

To them? What I, I guess I think the state test that is once a year, that measures what you should have learned, and that is pretty much my definition. Now the benchmark tests every quarter, they are not high stakes tests, as it the testing of our regular curriculum in our district.

**Has testing had any influence on the way you teach?**

Yes, huge amounts. (Big sigh). I think in the back of your mind every time you are teaching, you have that going, that they are going to be tested in the end. I feel like when I am sitting up there teaching, I'm saying here we are with these vocabulary words, you are going to see these again on the test, there is a reason for these. I have been teaching for eight and a half years and it wasn't the same

then as it is now. It is very key in what you teach to have the things that will be on the test.

**What kind of interactions do you have with your students – I know you teach special ed classes, are they whole class, one on one in your approach.**

I have a special resource room pullout. I never have more than nine is how my groups are worked out. I have my math group here at the horseshoe table with 4 or 5; reading because of schedule is usually a larger group. I have 1 on four, 1 on nine. I have 19 on my roster, but only see nine at a time.

**What behaviors do you notice in a child that might be nervous during a test?**

First, I try not to let them get to that point but I know that they do. They are staying on a specific problem for a long time, I know I had a student last year who I felt was at a shut down point, it was too much for her, and I said, "We have all the time we need for this test, (you know because of being in my classroom), get up, do some stretches, take a break." When they are shut down, you can see it in their faces, in the way they are acting. Even a couple of weeks before they take the test they are really asking questions, what is this test about, will it be hard, is it for a grade. You can tell they are worried. Now some students just don't care either. Some students shut down, some are really concerned, but those are students who are usually concerned about their progress anyway. But I see all aspects from shutting down to working really hard just to get it done. I repeat "its ok, you've got time, calm down."

**Do see any differences in students who get nervous or concerned during a test and those who don't?**

Well, the ones who get nervous in some respects are my better students, because they and I am picturing one in my head, I know he is very conscientious, and will take all the time he needs. I feel like the ones who are going to take all the time they need are possible going to be the ones who do better unless it overtakes them, which sometimes it does.

**Do you notice any difference in the way student's behavior during testing time and at more regular times in the classroom?**

I think they sense it from you, you know they see that they can't even rip the seal; it is a big deal, on the test. So when its over, they are like "whew" I'm glad that is over. I feel like there is a totally different change in behavior in them.

**Do you notice a difference in the way boys and girls behave during a test?**

Depends on them, but there is not a whole of difference, but it depends on their behavior problems (if any) too. There are certain students who might an ADHD problem that intensifies their behavior problems during testing, but I don't see it as a girl-boy thing.

**Do students share any about testing with you?**

They know they get more time with me, they realize they get more time and better, I don't want to say treatment, because it is not a treatment thing, but they see maybe they are getting coddled a little more, they are taking more time.

**Describe your behavior during testing time and in a regular classroom setting.**

It is more stress for me during testing time but they know it is a different time for them, even during a benchmark time, they know from me it is important.

**Describe the effects of testing results on curriculum.**

You should go back and look at data, I feel like an accountant here, but you should use the data to go back and look at what you are doing. You look at [results] and say well poetry wasn't covered well here, and you try to adjust.

**Describe the physical environment of your room during testing time.**

I don't really change much of the physical environment in terms of what is on the wall, but there is a change in desk arrangement and seating. Plus, there are people in the room to monitor that normally aren't here in the room so that changes things so students notice things are different.

**Please share any other thoughts you may wish to share about testing and student behavior.**

Students know when it is an important time and obviously because of being told all year round, this is a big deal, this is where our school is looked at, we want them to know their scores matter, that they matter, and what you do is important. I try to let them know that it is important that we do this, it has to be important in their life. I remember taking them as a child and the stress they brought, but my mother is a teacher, and tests are a big deal. They tell you it is a big deal, that your scores are going home, it wasn't as big a deal as it is now but it was important. I know it is a part of our society and we need accountability, and actually it is good in many ways, we have to take tests like the ACT and SAT to go on in life. I tell them that you may not enjoy this but think about what it can mean for you for later things.

**Teacher 2 Urban school**



### **3<sup>rd</sup> Grade teacher, 16 years experience**

#### **How do you prepare students if at all for test?**

Yes, I do prepare them. We take review activities, with the DOL we take a skill sheet on the back, it has a story or a listening thing that I have to read them the story and then they have to answer the questions after I have read it one time. We take the practice test for the state test, we have a daily review worksheets for the test so they have been exposed to those kinds of questions.

#### **What is your definition of a high stakes test?**

Right now they are all high stakes tests! Having to disaggregate every score and breaking down everything. It is all high stakes.

#### **What influence has testing had, if any on the way you teach?**

Well it almost has to because you have got to teach them the way questions are going to be asked, the way they will be worded, you know, I do a lot of writing with my kids and a lot of times they don't transfer things, so I have to go "now I am going to go over this" so they have a clue what it will look like [on the test].

#### **How would describe normal interactions between you and your students?**

I am very nurturing, I have arthritis and another teacher took my kid, she said you sat down and all my kids said where's Mrs. \*\*\*\*? So my students are very dependant on me. Several are very low, they are very low and don't have much self esteem, so it is a lot of building. I taught special Ed for 9 years so I know [how important it is}. I have 20 students. One is coming from the Ed class.

How would you describe your students if they were nervous?

There is a lot of pencil tapping, they, you can watch them just go down and answer the questions without really looking at the answers, they are constantly moving

How are the students who don't get nervous different from those that do?

They are calm, they just sit there, and they act like it is just another daily worksheet. They go through it, most are very meticulous. They want to get it right. If they can't read, they get frustrated and can't go on, but if they can they just go right through it.

Does the type of test seem to make a difference?

Most of them are so used to testing now it doesn't seem to make a difference if it is the standardized test in the spring, an end of instruction test, or whatever. They have unit tests and math unit tests, star reading tests, all of which are similar to the big test. They are so used to taking tests that it doesn't matter what kind of test, it is a matter of business.

**Do you observe any differences between boys and girls behaviors during testing?**

I see more of the boys just going through it and just answering, not reading the test question.

**Do they share anything with you about testing?**

We talk about it as a group before we take the test and then after it, I press to see how they felt about it and if they have any questions. Are they nervous about it? I don't want them to think if they fail this test that 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is going to be theirs again. With this class, because they are so low, we talk about that a lot.

**How does testing affect your behavior?**

If they are playing a lot before the test, then I am stricter than I usually am. That is really the only thing different about me because I want them to do well.

What else would you like to share about your observations of students during testing?

I notice many students haven't eaten before the test, they are hungry so I try to keep pretzels or something while they take the test to try and calm them down. We don't serve breakfast here so I pretzels and cereal here especially before a test to try and keep food on their desk that they can have. The cafeteria does provide a nutritious snack during that testing week.

**What curriculum changes if any result from testing?**

Absolutely there are changes. My school is trying very hard to get off of the list so there are changes. They come in and say "you are going to do this instead" with the curriculum. You know there will be curricular changes because you are on the list and they are going to make sure we get off the list. Testing drives everything. The first year we got to try our own changes and have extra training, things like that, bringing in other training to see if it would change things. Next thing the state comes in and then in a couple of years, the federal government comes in if we are still on the list.

Schools get rewards for most improved school and highest achieving school.

Describe the environment of your room during testing.

We have to move the desks so they are all in the row so the kids can't see, I have to make folders, they are a low class, they are used to working with each other because we do a lot of group work so I have to make privacy folders so they will work alone. During the big test week, I talk to them about getting lots of sleep and eating right. They know the results go to the Service center and the state. So many worry that the test is going to go on their record or their report card.

**Are there any other changes in behavior of your students during testing that you would like to share?**

A lot of them like last year in particular where we did some team teaching, but yet they did testing with their home room teacher, with me some would take their time and read, but with their homeroom teacher they just went through and marked answers. If they would have been with me I would have had them go back and take their time because I know them better on that subject. One student in particular liked me and didn't like his home room teacher so he would listen to me. These kids all know me and trust me and aren't going to do something like just mark an answer. If I tell them "start again" they are going to go back through and check their work.

**Tape 2**

**Rural School**

Teacher 1 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 15 years experience  
Charlize  
White female

**What are your memories of testing?**

I felt stifled. I was not a good test taker. I was nervous when I took a test, just hearing the word test blocked information I needed. It would not come to me correctly. I would just lose it and then it would come back to me later, therefore I would just do the best I could on the test.

**What do you believe is the best way to assess students?**

By watching them and listening to them. I really believe that. I think that it is probably a better indication on how a child does daily by watching them rather than just testing them once whether it is a state test or a classroom test, to see if they have the knowledge you have given them.

**How do students in your class behave during a test?**

Positively and negatively in my classroom. They react because in my class I weight tests as two grades, so I know they get nervous before they even get to the test. I probably do put them at ease once they begin testing because they usually do better on classroom tests than they do on daily work.

**Describe the environment that is present during testing.**

I try to keep the environment of the classroom the same for about four weeks prior to the state tests. I arrange the desks and take things down so they are used to it and they will learn to not rely on the classroom visual aids. I try to have peppermints on their desks with two sharpened pencils each day of the test. The room is spic and span clean. Because they make us take down everything for testing, I try to replace it with something that has some life in it so it is positive but not too colorful to take their attention when they glance up. Obviously there are two Kleenex on their desk. I try to provide an environment that is warm for them because the state testing, whether it is 3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> because I've done both, when we pass out those thick books, thick booklets, they just look at you like "oh my." And even though I do not agree with state testing, never have and never will, I know it is a part of my job that I have to give those [tests].

**How do you prepare your students for tests?**

I definitely, whether it is right or wrong, I teach for the test, until I cover those objectives that I feel that all the kids, my low, my average and my high, have a taste of [the test]. I usually take my high and teach a little beyond that if I know they can take the bait, because I know as a teacher that as those scores come up it makes a difference for the school system. Once I have those objectives taught, whether it is in a unit or after a test, I will enrich them with something fun, but I get my objectives covered. I will use calculators, or write checks, something fun to enrich but I definitely cover every single testing objective because the outcome is important to the district.

**What types of behavior do you notice in students during testing?**

Maybe just a little bit more careful, I think they check their work more often. I know I weight regular tests for two grades so they are very conscious of being careful. I think they realize how important test grades are, and I think as I show them averages that if they are borderline A or B or C that one answer can make a difference. I really don't see them being nervous in a classroom test, and I allow them to still come up and ask me questions if they need to during a test, to re-explain things or to ask questions. I don't ever just say "do the work" or "too bad, we've already covered this." They can still come up to me and I will give

them little hints, or re-word it for them. The tests I give them I don't think are very stressful, compared with state tests.

During state tests, students that are comfortable with themselves and their knowledge, they do fine. Those who are not comfortable get apprehensive. The knowledge of having the test makes them freeze up. I see them – they almost read it too many times. They try too hard. They are perched on the edge of their seat. They keep looking up. Still, usually at the end of the test, if they are [students] not being timed they will be the first ones lining up at the door because they know they can have extra time. I don't know if that is good or bad in 5<sup>th</sup> grade because they just read too much into it. It just confuses them.

### **How else might the environment be different during testing time?**

Well, we offer breakfast during the state testing week. We only give one test in the morning, then in the afternoon we play some type of reward game. Obviously before the test we give them some type of snack.

### **Mannerisms noted during testing?**

Some swirl their hair, some spin their pencils, their regular classroom mannerisms are just times four, they do them more. They are just more tense. I don't think that is bad because it gives them adrenaline. We just rely too much on that one particular test.

### **What types of recognition, positive or negative are given to schools in your district:**

Yes. There is pressure on us. I think the test scores in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> – they look at the teachers, content areas, and test scores. They look at the school for tests. We stress that students be here during testing week, and that if they are absent they will still have to take the test in the conference room with the counselor and different students from different classes. We want them here during that testing week because I think they will do better. Usually to be honest that makes them more nervous to think they will be out of their comfort area for this test. It is not a picture of comfort for them – the conference room has just plain four walls, they are with the counselor not me, I am sure they would be nervous.

Our district sends letters home about the tests, and our food service department sends notes home about snacks, and our school serves breakfast that week which is strange to me because sometimes those kids who eat breakfast anyone come in and eat another breakfast which changes their whole pattern. That throws their morning off. I think if we are going to do breakfast we should do it all along. And some kids come in crying because they lost their money and they wanted breakfast and they are upset and you don't feel right about that either. It is great to have breakfast but it changes their routine and some kids can't afford breakfast and they feel left out.

There are other results from standardized tests [in the district]. I don't think testing for the gifted or learning disabled should be the only things used in deciding things in terms of retention or placement. I disagree that one test can reach all kids. There are different kinds of learners and different levels of learning. I hear of a national curriculum but it will not work for the same reasons. Some of the low help the high and some of the high help the low. Everyone has something to offer in a class and as a teacher in a classroom, the things I do for my students might not work for someone else. And the pattern, the way I get through my curriculum, may not work for every teacher. Plus, all of my classes are different every year, so I may begin at a different place or a different place in the book, instead of just beginning way back in the beginning or where someone else says I need to be. Kids are different every year. You don't know what will work every year. You can't just open up last year's plan book and use that with a different group of kids. But that is what a national curriculum would do.

**What differences in behavior do you see between 3rd graders and 5<sup>th</sup> graders while testing?**

You know, I think third grade comes in.....5<sup>th</sup> grade comes in more serious, they begin to develop that either I care or don't care attitude. They are developing as individuals, where the third graders just want to please the teacher, their parents, and others. They are still just little boys and girls. In fifth grade they are becoming little adults, young ladies are developing. I would say they may take it more serious. I think it ridiculous to test kids in third grade and absolutely wrong to test in kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Those grades should be hands on curriculum and assessment the same way. I have seen my own kids come up; the things that I got to do when I was little have been taken away from them. Pencil and paper are now the way to teach curriculum and it should not be that way.

I have seen kids freeze up during a test, they start to scribble on the sides of the page or draw pictures. And we note that on the pad and the file so if the test comes back low, I can have something to share with the parents about that test day, and offer them to compare that score with how they do in class with the everyday curriculum and assessments. They usually are fine, I try to put parents into their [students] place, make them think how they would react to that kind of test, and how that child would have felt. Probably to this day, I would not ever become a better test taker myself.

**What kinds of things, if any do students share with you about testing?**

My observation of students is that they all want to score high. They talk about and ask questions about how the test will effect going on to sixth grade, who will

know their score, what do the scores mean, they have heard about their scores being ranked. I do put a little emphasis on that they want to do the best they can. That is all we ask, that they do the best they possibly can. Don't leave any blank. There is a lot about testing in fifth grade that factors in. The test booklet is here, the answer sheet is over here, they can get on the wrong line. If you don't catch that child, or if you do and they have to start erasing, you have to remember that the child is a nervous wreck from that point on. I don't think its fair for their test to be counted if that happens because they are so nervous after that. They can't think straight. Testing – it is just all wrong.

### **Teacher 2 3<sup>rd</sup> grade 11 years**

**My first four years I taught in a Christian schools.**

**What preparations for tests do you make if any (the state test in the spring).**

Test preparations - we review, review, review,... we start early so we don't overload them, we send home review packets that we make up. We play review games, we include review in our morning work, and we try and hit a little bit of it all by testing.

**What is your definition of a high stakes test?**

High Stakes Test? let me see... I am not sure what that means, I guess it would mean a test that really counts, so the scores better be high? I really am not familiar with that term.

**What kind of influence has testing had on the way you teach?**

Influence on the way I teach. I don't get to be as creative with thematic units and fun stuff like that. We do some, but our focus is on testing.

**What effects does testing have on your curriculum?**

A lot of the curriculum has test prep materials included now, this was a big push for selling the new adopted math curriculum this past spring. We cover it all, but again, the focus is on teaching what the test covers.

**What preparation for tests do you make with our students, if any?**

I make sure I cover all of the pass objectives. The district I came from recognized test scores. They tested early, and the scores came back before the school year was out. If you scored in a certain percentile, each child that scored in that certain percentile got to take off a whole day and go to Celebration Station. It made a difference. Some kids don't really take this kind of test serious so they try harder for the reward. They think of the test as a game, but this incentive at least got them to think about trying, because you are going to be left if you don't



get that score while everyone else gets to go on a field trip to Celebration Station, go have pizza and spend the whole day doing stuff like that.

**What differences are there between your students in terms of behavior during a regular classroom test and the standardized test?**

Probably more I notice in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade a difference here in Oklahoma. We try to make the atmosphere fun during the days of testing week, we finish testing and have extra snacks, extra recess. They know it is more important because we stress, "this really matters, this counts, try your best." I will even offer the whole class, but I'm looking really for just a couple of students, to try. Those you say to, knowing they have a least an hour of reading, don't bring me your test in five minutes. There is more anxiety during the week long standardized test, but that is usually with the kids that do well anyway and put more pressure on themselves. Some of the comment sheets I get back from parents at the first of the year about their students say they are worried about the big test. Now, that is week one and they are already thinking about that test. They know from previous years in school, when everyone has to be quiet because of testing, schedules are different, they know. It is always the kids who are going to do really really well anyway that worry. They go through more anxiety.

**What differences do you note between the behavior of boys and girls during testing?**

Not really, not any real differences.

**What is the environment of the classroom like during testing time?**

My classroom doesn't look different. I just have up basic stuff, I take down the multiplication chart and the fractions. No, pretty much everything stays the same. We move our desks the same as everyone else. They do offer breakfast at our schools just during testing week. That is something different. They bring extra snacks in, we have snack breaks and drink breaks. We get them up to stretch and romp around. They like having breakfast and they make a big deal about having it, but I don't know how many do and don't normally eat breakfast to know if that is a big difference or not.

**What are the results of a standardized test used for?**

I think it reflects their learning to a high degree. I know there are always exceptions, you may have someone that is a really good guesser, but for the most part it does show their learning. It may be different if they have high test anxiety level, they may talk themselves out of a correct answer, but for the most part kids that are A B students are going to score higher, and those that aren't will score lower. I think considering the test scores are a part of other things



such as daily work, other test scores when it comes to retention and placement decisions.

**What other behaviors do you notice during testing?**

There are some things I don't understand as a teacher. Last year, our students scored very very high, so I don't understand the pressure every year to improve. You have that same test with a different group of students. It would be, I would say it would be more meaningful to track that group of students as they move up, see if there is improvement from third grade to fifth grade. There might be some sort of correlation there. So those behaviors I don't understand. Most students who are conscientious about their grades will act worried about the test some.

**What do you feel about a national curriculum?**

I see kids moving from state to state, some come in high, some don't so you have to wonder why that is. I don't think it is a bad idea.

My principal at my other school said something that made sense to me. She said you play the hand you are dealt. We have those kids six months in the room before we have to test them. I can't control what has been going on in their home, what kind of education they had before they came here. People who are offered incentives for how their school or students do are put in situations they may not want to be in. I know in another state I taught in, my kids were in one school and I taught in another, and their test scores were always higher. There were all kinds of rumors floating around. You don't know if it's true, but boy you know that their scores never fell. They had a lot of pressure from their principal.

**What are your memories of testing?**

In elementary it probably wasn't so bad. I don't remember it being as big of a deal as it is now. Maybe it is because it seems to be such a bigger deal now. In high school I remember everyone filing in, getting a board and a number two pencil. That is it.

**Any other observations of student behavior during testing?**

Just that it can be unfair for some. You should stick with apples and apples and oranges to oranges.

## APPENDIX D

### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER (Signed by teachers being interviewed)

#### A. AUTHORIZATION

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (respondent) \_\_\_\_\_, hereby authorize or direct Deborah Landry, or associates or assistants of her choosing, to perform the following research.

#### B. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AND ASSOCIATED RISKS/BENEFITS

1. Name of research project: *Teachers Perception of Student Behavior during Testing.*
2. This study involves research and is being conducted through Oklahoma State University. The principal researcher is Deborah Landry, a doctoral student in the College of Education.
3. The purpose of the research is to review changes which may occur in student behavior during testing as observed by the teacher. The expected duration of the subject's participation is approximately 5 hours during a 10 to 20 day period of time.
4. Respondents will be required to be interviewed twice, once before a testing of their students, and once after testing. Each interview will last approximately 30 to 40 minutes. Interviews will be tape recorded for later transcription by the researcher. Interviews will consist of questions about testing, test anxiety, and observations about student's behavior during testing.
5. The risk to participants during the course of this study is considered minimal.
6. Respondents may gain insight into how testing impacts their student's behavior. This information may or may not shape future decisions about the effects of testing in his or her own classroom.
7. The respondent's name will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in place of names and schools for reporting purposes. The researcher will protect the confidentiality of respondents to the maximum extent possible. Interview tapes and notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher, Deborah Landry's home office. Interview notes and tapes will be destroyed upon approval of the dissertation.
8. Explanation of how and whom to contact about:

- a. For questions about the research: Contact Deborah Landry, 918 274 8575, or [teach4life@aol.com](mailto:teach4life@aol.com); or Dr. Kathryn Castle, (405) 744 7125.
- b. For questions about research subjects' rights: Contact the IRB office: Oklahoma State University, 415 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078. Phone 405-744 5700.
- c. Additional contact: Dr. Carol Olson, IRB Chair, Oklahoma State University, 415 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078. Phone: 405-744-5700.

### **C. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I will not be penalized if I choose not to participate. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and end my participation in this project at any time without penalty after I notify the project director, Deborah Landry. I may reach her by phoning 918 274 8575, via e-mail at [teach4life@aol.com](mailto:teach4life@aol.com), or writing at P. O. Box 2135, Owasso, OK 74055.

### **D. CONSENT DOCUMENTATION FOR WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT**

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(a.m./p.m.)

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Name (typed)

Signature

I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the subject or his/her representative before requesting the subject or his/her representative to sign it.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Deborah Landry

## APPENDIX D

### LETTER TO SCHOOL BUILDING PRINCIPALS

Dear

My name is Deborah Landry, and I am a graduate student at Oklahoma State University College of Education. I am a doctoral student in the School of Teaching and Educational Leadership. I am writing my dissertation and am interested in finding two teachers from your school who would be interested in being a part of my study. I am interested in interviewing one teacher from K-2 and one teacher from grades 3-5 about their perceptions of student behavior during testing. I am interested in how student behavior may or may not differ during testing time from behavior during regular school time.

My research will require:

- Two interviews with each teacher
- Review of my interview transcripts with each teacher

I would like you to identify two teachers who meet the following criteria:

- Teaching since 2001
- One teacher from grades K-2
- One teacher from grades 3-5

I appreciate your time and support in this process. I will interview the teachers during times that are convenient for them and their schedules. I will not be any classrooms while students are present, nor will I name the teachers, school name, or district in my dissertation. I will have an informed consent letter for teachers to review and sign prior to beginning any interviewing or surveying.

I can be reached at (918) 274 8575 (home) or at (918)-456 5511, x 3710 (work). My email address is [teach4life@aol.com](mailto:teach4life@aol.com)

Sincerely,

Deborah Landry

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Interview Script**

Hello, my name is Deborah Landry. I am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. I was given your name by your principal, \_\_\_\_\_ as a participant in my research.

Let me tell you about my dissertation. I am investigating teacher's perception of student behavior during testing. I am interviewing teachers in the district on an Internet survey, and also am interviewing four teachers before and after testing. You are one of the four teachers I will be interviewing before and after testing is accomplished in the classroom.

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. To aid my notes I would like to tape the interviews. The tapes will only be heard by me as I transpose them to written form. I will contact you when the tapes have been transposed to a written document and ask you meet with me and review what I have written about our interviews. I will keep the tapes of the interviews until my dissertation has been approved and published. Until that time they will be secured in my home office in a locked file cabinet. I will then destroy the tapes.

I do plan to keep a record of your name and phone number until I have published my dissertation in case I need to get back to you for additional information. However, I will not use your name in any reports of my study and I will also destroy records containing your name and phone number upon publication and approval of my dissertation.

I would like you to now read the informed consent letter for this study. When you are finished reading the informed consent letter, please sign the letter and I will then begin to ask questions for the first interview.

### **Interview Questions**

1. How do you prepare your students for tests?
2. What is your definition of a high stakes test?
3. What influence has testing had on the way you teach?
4. How would you describe your interactions with students?
5. How many students are in your class?
6. How can you tell if someone is nervous during a test?

7. How do students act if they are nervous during a test?
8. How are students who don't get nervous during tests different from students who get nervous during tests?
9. How does a student's body let you know they are nervous or worried during a test?
10. In what ways do your students behave during tests?
11. How do your students behave during the period of time they are taking tests?
12. How do boys differ from girls in the way they act during tests?
13. What do students share with you about taking tests?
14. How is your behavior affected while administering tests?
15. Is there anything you would like to add or discuss about student behavior during testing?
16. Describe your student's behavior during testing.
17. Describe any differences in behavior from regular classroom behavior you may have observed.
18. Describe how student behavior during testing might have impacted your behavior and outlook?
19. What changes, if any you do envision in your curricular approach prior to future testing of students?
20. Describe your reflections on students during testing and how it impacts your teaching approach.
21. Describe the environment of the room during testing.

22. Tell me about the behavior of boys during testing.

23. Tell me about the behavior of girls during testing.

Thank you for allowing me to interview you today. Here is my card with my name, phone number and email address if you have any questions about the study you may think of after I have returned to school. We need to schedule a time for me to come back for to review my notes and transcript of your interview. (We will look at a calendar and set up a date and time to review the transcribed interviews).

## VITA

Deborah Ellen Landry

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: TEACHERS' (K-5) PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT BEHAVIORS  
DURING STANDARDIZED TESTING

Major Field: Curriculum

Biographical:

Experience: 8/2004 – Present - Assistant Professor, Elementary Education, School of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
2/98 – 8/2004 Owasso Public Schools, Owasso, Oklahoma  
Teacher: Kindergarten teacher, 2nd Grade teacher,  
3/77 - 12/97: United States Marine Corps, Washington, DC  
Marine Corps Officer, Traffic Management Officer, Transportation Officer, Contracting Officer, Personal Property and Travel Officer, Digital Data Systems Technician.

Education: 2000 – Present: Oklahoma State University Stillwater, Oklahoma Doctoral Student, Early Childhood Curriculum, Graduate May 2005

12/97 - Marymount University Arlington, VA

Master of Science, NK-8 Education

6/91 - Troy State University Troy, AL, MCAS Iwakuni Japan

Master of Science, Educational Leadership

9/87 - University of the State of New York - Regent's College, Albany, New York, Bachelor of Science, Liberal Science/Studies

5/81 - Shelby State Community College Memphis, TN

Associate Degree, Business Administration

Certifications: Superintendent, Elementary Principal, Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Middle School-Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies; Secondary Business Education.



Name: Deborah Landry

Date of Degree: May, 2005

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT BEHAVIORS  
DURING STANDARDIZED TESTING

Pages in Study: 159

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: Curriculum

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of standardized testing on student behavior as perceived by their teachers. The study consisted of an online survey of 63 teachers and four individual interviews. Participants in the study were 63 teachers in grades kindergarten through fifth grade from two northeastern Oklahoma elementary school districts, and from a local university affiliate of a National Writing Project. Each participant completed an online survey. Four teachers were interviewed, two from an urban district and two from a suburban district. The methodological framework was a qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological approach to human science.

Findings and Conclusions: Six themes emerged from the data analysis. Data analysis included information discovered from the online survey open-ended comments, teacher interviews, field notes of research, and lived experience of researcher as a teacher. The themes identified included the following: (1) teacher memories of testing, (2) helplessness, (3) accountability and curriculum, (4) community, (5), nurturing, and (6) changes. Two themes, teacher autonomy and gender, were found missing or negative in the study. The study found teachers perceived many changes in student behavior during testing; teacher memories of testing impact role of nurturing during testing; and the classroom physical environment changes during testing. Future research suggested includes the impact of teacher memories of testing on students, classroom environment and student anxiety during testing, and teacher job satisfaction compared to past years.

Advisor's Approval: Dr. Kathryn Castle